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MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE OFFICE.

THE town of Liskeard is a strange one. The first question the visitor asks is: 'What can have brought it there?' It does not occupy the ridge or spur of a hill, as one that has gathered round a border castle; it does not occupy a valley by a river, as one that has nestled about an abbey; it is not planted at a convergence of roads, as one that lives and thrives on commerce. It consists of a multitude of houses tumbled promiscuously over steep hill and narrow dale, so that the chimneys of one house throw their smoke in at the windows of another, and a street is as contorted laterally as a letter S, and undulates vertically as a switch-back railway.

The reason why Liskeard is a town, and was planted where it is, must be sought down a narrow lane that leads to a great unfailing, limpid spring pouring forth a flood of the purest water through four orifices. The old British saints loved to settle by springs of water, and there is hardly a church in Cornwall that is not associated with a holy well. No well in the county is so copious, so marvellous in its unfailing supply as that of Liskeard. It may have received divine homage in pagan times; it certainly received consecration by some shaggy Keltic hermit; he settled by it, wrought miracles with its water, and his cell became the nucleus of a town.

In an old slated house in one of the tortuous streets of Lis-keard lived Mr. Physic, solicitor and property agent. Anyone who has been into a lawyer's office anywhere in that world that supports lawyers knows them all. They are as alike as dried peas. Some have more iron cases, lettered with the initials or names of clients, than have others, some have the table more littered with correspondence and half-endorsed deeds than others, but all have the same look, the same smell, the same character.

Mr. Physic had just risen from his desk to take some midday refreshment—a glass of sherry and sandwiches—when the clerk showed in Mr. Pike, the horsebreaker.

‘How d’y do?’ said the agent cheerily. ‘And how’s the missus and all the babbies?’

‘Very well, thank you, sir, very well. We’re all tough, thanks be.’

‘Take a chair,’ said Physic; ‘come at an opportune moment. Just had my humble lunch brought in. Let me pour you out a glass of sherry.’

‘No, thank you, sir,’ said the horsebreaker, taking a seat. He wanted a glass of wine, he intended to have it, but he knew what good manners were, and required to be pressed.

‘Now, come,’ said the solicitor. ‘You have been engaged with a skittish horse, I can see; look a little pulled about, you do. By name I am allied to the medical profession, so let me prescribe.’

‘Thank you, sir, I feel hearty. I never drink before I eat.’

‘Then eat, Pike, at once. Here are sandwiches.’

‘I wouldn’t deprive you.’

‘Not deprive me at all. I will ring for more. Now, a glass?’ holding the decanter in the position of the earth as it rotates round the sun.

‘I really had rather not.’

‘Half a glass?’

‘Well, then, as you are so pressing, half a glass.’

‘Very well, only a half.’

So Mr. Physic filled it, not so as to run over; that made half a glass; a glass that overflows is a whole glass. After Pike had eaten a sandwich and drunk his glass, the agent put his head on one side and said suppliantly: ‘Come, let me pour you out another.’

‘Not on any account.’

‘I insist.’

‘Well, there is a crumb in my windpipe—a drop—not above a drop.’

So his glass was replenished.

'Now, then,' said Physic, 'what is the business, Pike?' But just as the lawyer had hung back before asking this question, so now did the horsebreaker hang back from answering it.

'Look there,' said Pike, pointing to a dog on the mat by the fireplace. 'That poor brute has got the distemper. I'll tell you what you should do with her. Give her some wine. She's running at the eyes and nose. If you don't take care you'll lose her. Give her sherry with syrup of squills and camphor water. That will bring her round like the minute-hand of a clock.'

'I'll do it,' said Physic. 'Now to business. I'm your man.'

'You don't notice any smell, do you?' asked the horsebreaker.

'No, Pike; why?'

'Because there's a man selling real fresh bloaters, and I bought a few and have them here. My wife can't touch red salt herrings; they give her heartburn. But the real fresh bloater is another thing. The man has a cartload. I'd have more if I wasn't riding.'

'Well; now to business.'

'Very well, sir.' Pike touched his forehead. 'It's only about a little field and a stable, you know, sir, that Matthew Kneebone had.'

'Oh, you can't have those; they are to be thrown into Philip Downe's lot.'

'It would be uncommon convenient for me.'

'Convenient or not, it can't be helped. I believe Mr. Curgenven has as much as promised it.'

'But I want a paddock, and that stable comes in terrible handy for me.'

'There are difficulties.'

'I dare say there be. But I want that paddock and linney uncommon bad. And, look here, Lawyer Physic, I don't mind a couple of guineas; and I'll give you a bit of advice as may be useful.'

'Oh, advice!'

'Why I reckon if I come to you for advice I have to pay six-and-eight for it.'

'Yes, but I am a solicitor.'

'Well, and I am a man who has his eyes and ears open. And the bit o' advice I can give you may be worth many scores of six-and-eightpences. Take the two guineas'—he put the money, two sovereigns and two shillings, on the table—'and my advice, which

is worth more nor that, and manage for me the paddock and the stable.'

'Very well, then,' said Physic, drawing the money to him. 'Now for the advice.'

'They say you're going to open a mine at Tolmenna.'

'Yes, I am.'

'You'll like to go there and look about, and see how the mine gets along.'

'Of course.'

'Then I just wouldn't.'

'Why so?'

'Well, you shouldn't go without someone to go along with you. There's that ould chap Morideg, as you sent to prison and turned out o' his house. He ain't gone so terrible far. He's at that wisht place now, Smallacomb, by the Trewartha Marsh. Farmer Hockin have let'n into an ou'd linney there.'

'And what if he have?'

'Well, he don't look on you with a very loving eye. He's an ignorant man; he's knocked you down once, and he says, says he, give him a chance, and he'll finish you some day. I'd keep off the moors if I was you, Lawyer, for a bit. Mebbe Morideg 'll move further off. As long as he's near, and his heart of a blaze wi' wrongs, if I was you, Lawyer Physic, I'd just keep to the roads and lanes, and not show my head on the moor.'

'If he attempted to lay but a finger on me——'

'I don't reckon he'll lay a finger on you, sir; but he might hap accidental, when you was by, to lay a finger on the trigger of his old gun. He's a cruel good shot, folks say.'

Physic's face turned white.

'I'm really much obliged,' he said. 'I really am. You shall have the paddock and linney. I'll tell the squire they were promised to you before Downe applied.'

'No offence, sir. You don't happen to have an axe or a chopper here, do you?'

'I cannot say I have. Why?'

'Because, Lawyer Physic, if you had, I'd say, put it in the corner, and turn 'n with the blade upperways to cut the ill wish.'

'What ill wish?'

'The old woman, Mrs. Morideg. Her's got the evil eye, and her has ill-wished you afore a score o' people. It's sure to come on you unless you cut it off wi' a hatchet, as I said.'

'I'll risk that, Pike.' Then, as a tap came at his door, in a loud tone: 'Come in!'

'Mrs. Curgenven,' said the clerk. 'Are you engaged, sir?'

'For Mrs. Curgenven, at her service. By-bye, Pike, you shall have the—you know what; and I'll remember what you said.'

As Theresa came in: 'How do you do, my dear madam? What an honour! What a pleasure! Allow me to ring for another glass and some more sandwiches.'

Pike, the horsebreaker, put his hand to his forehead and backed out of the office, but took advantage of Mrs. Curgenven's attention being directed towards the agent to have a good stare at the new squireess.

'A chair—nay, five—all in the office are at your disposal,' said Physic. 'And sherry. What say you, madam? We must build up our constitutions; we mustn't let the clock run down.'

Theresa slightly bowed. She turned to see that Pike had left and had shut the door, and then, coming close to the office desk, and resting her gloved hand on it, she said: 'You are, no doubt, aware for what purpose I am here, Mr. Physic.'

'Stay a bit,' said the agent. He ran to the door and recalled Pike, and when the horsebreaker returned Physic said: 'By the way, I think Mr. Pike may be able to throw some light on a topic we mentioned the other day. Now, my good fellow, lend me your attention for a few minutes. Screw up your memory to concert pitch. Tell me if by great exertion you can recall what happened in October five years ago.'

'Yes, sir. I broke a nice little cob for Sir Sampson Tregontic.'

'I do not mean that. Can you remember whether you did anything for the late Captain Lambert?'

'No, sir, not five years ago; four years ago, come March, I bought him a mare which I thought 'ud a done for his carriage. You see, the second of his pair had a splint——'

'I do not mean that either, Pike. I am referring to your witnessing a document. Did Captain Curgenven ever call you into the house——'

'Into the Bungalow, sir.'

'Yes, into the Bungalow, to see him set his hand to any document?'

'Oh yes, I remember it quite well.'

'And what was the document, Pike?'

'Well, sir, I can't say as I was given it to look at. The squire he said he only wanted me and Roger Morideg to witness his signature to his will; that was all I knew about it.'

'Exactly. You can write your name, Pike, I suppose?'

'To be sure I can. I'm not a scholar. Never had the chances some young folk has now, but I can write "Samuel Pike"; I can do that.'

'And old Morideg?'

'Oh, he couldn't; he could only put a cross, and that a rare queer one I reckon, so the squire he put to it that it was his token, as how he couldn't write.'

'And you remember this perfectly, Pike?'

'Perfectly. It was just afore St. Matthew's fair at Liskeard.'

'Thank you, that will do, Pike. I will not detain you longer.'

When the horsebreaker had left the office, Pike said with a smile: 'I thought it as well, as Pike happened to be here, to find out what he knew about the signature. When I show you the will in a minute or two you will see that it is as he said. He signed his name as witness, and old Morideg set his cross. Why Captain Lambert had these two men in to see him set his hand to the will is not hard to discover. The document was to be used only on an emergency, only in the event of your reappearing, and therefore in the event of his marriage with Miss Jane Pamphlet proving invalid and vitiating the marriage settlement. He therefore went out of his way to get a couple of ignorant and uninterested persons to act as witnesses. That, I take it, is the meaning of Pike and Morideg having been employed on the occasion. If you have any further doubt—if you think that I am trying to deceive you, go and ask old Roger Morideg. He has no love for me. I consigned him to prison for having knocked me down, and I have turned him out of his house. But he can't deny that he was called in by Captain Curgenven to witness his signature to his last will and testament. Now, madam.'

Physic went to his desk and unlocked a drawer. He drew forth a long envelope, and held it under the eyes of Theresa.

'You remember this, madam? It was what you put into my hands.'

'Yes. That is it,' said Theresa, recognising at once the inscription on the cover.

'Very well,' said Physic. He drew the contents from the envelope, unfolded and spread the paper on the desk.

'Let me see,' mused the agent. 'How shall it be? I'm not going to put this into your hands. It's too valuable to me, and ditto to you. I'll hold it out flat on the desk, and you shall look over my shoulder and read it. Will that satisfy you?'

'You cannot trust me?'

Physic laughed. 'You've been too long in America. You know too much of the seamy side of life. You've been at the grindstone so that a fine edge is put on you. Thank you, madam, I'd rather not.'

He stood at the desk with his hands on the open will, and Theresa looked at it over his shoulder.

'There!' said the solicitor, pointing to the bottom of the third sheet as he turned it over. 'Look! it is as Pike said: there is Morideg's scrambling cross, as crooked and shapeless as some of the granite crosses on the moor. And there stands "Samuel Pike"; and, pray observe, every folio initialed or signed. No mistake about it, none at all. How do you like it?'

'Let me read it,' said Theresa.

A little hope had risen in her heart that there might be in it some mention of herself—not for the sake of a bequest, but as a token of kindly feeling from her first husband. This will was to stand if she reappeared on the scene. She read it through, but her name did not once occur in it; not a penny was left to her by it; not a token appeared that Lambert entertained the smallest atom of regard for her.

She sighed.

'Ah! it makes you uncomfortable,' said Physic with a chuckle. 'You don't relish having to turn out of Curgenven, do you?'

'It was not over that I sighed.'

'Oh! but that is not a cheering prospect. What will you do? "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed," eh? Go on the stage again, and maintain Mr. Percival in cigars and cheap claret on what you earn? And have that pittance sliced into to send Justinian to school. You would prefer his absence to his presence.'

'I do not believe,' said Theresa, 'that Mrs. Jane will thank you for this will. She would prefer to remain as she is rather than have it produced.'

'I shall not ask her. I know that as well—better than you. She is too proud to endure the thought that she was not married respectably, and is not all square in the sight of society. But

that is nothing to me. I prove the will, whether she likes it or not—whether you like it or not. I shall find some explanation for its not having been produced earlier.'

'But if Mrs. Jane Curgenven does not wish it, why should you?'

'Put it as you will. I am an honourable man, and am bound to carry out the instructions of my deceased client. Or put it,' he laughed, 'that I owe you a grudge for having refused me and taken Percival Curgenven. It is the same to me which way you put it.'

'It is of no use, I suppose, my pleading with you?'

'None the least. Words are naught. But, I won't say that I am not amenable to reason, if very solid reason—*solid* reason, understand—be given me why I should put the will back in my desk.'

'Surely these are solid reasons that neither party affected by the will desires its production. I, certainly not, for it sends me and my husband to poverty. But then I am quite sure Jane Curgenven does not desire that this will should be proved; the wound to her pride would be too great.'

'These may be solid reasons to you, but not to me.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'Come, now,' said Physic, 'I'm going to open a mine on a bit of moor I've acquired. It will cost money, and I shall have to sink a lot before there can be any return. Now, look here, madam, I will undertake one thing. Find me three hundred pounds, and for a twelvemonth you shall hear no more of this will. It shall remain in my desk, and not even walk out of its envelope.'

'Three hundred pounds!'

'Three hundred pounds. Unless that be forthcoming within one fortnight, I shall go to the Probate Office with the will.'

'I will speak to my husband.'

'You shall not mention it to him. I tell you he is too careless about consequences to be trusted. The will proved, he will curse his stars he was such a fool as not to propitiate me.'

'But how am I to find three hundred pounds?'

'That is your affair. A woman of the world such as you is full of expedients.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

It was Sunday: a fair and pleasant day. The Sunday-school scholars in file had been marched to church and ranged on their benches, exhaling around them a combined odour of soap and bergamot.

Farmers, in their glossy black coats and tall hats of antiquated fashion, took their places. The servants from the Rectory and from the Manor arrived as flights of humming-birds, so brilliant was their plumage. The choir were collected about the organ that occupied the north chancel aisle, and at it sat, or 'presided,' as newspapers say, Jane Curgenven in widow's weeds. The organ had stood for several decades under the tower arch at the west end of the nave, where it was in perhaps the best position it could occupy. But there is a fashion in placing organs as there is a fashion in hats, and when the fashion was in full flow to have the organ at the east end of an aisle, where it would be most unsightly, at considerable cost it was removed to that position, and the rector preached on the occasion to assure the parishioners that the changed position of the instrument had no doctrinal signification.

At the urgency of the incumbent, to the irritation and amid the growls of the neighbourhood, on the death of the penultimate squire a memorial reredos had been set up to him in the chancel by public subscription, and now the neighbourhood was in agonies of apprehension lest an appeal should go forth for subscriptions to a memorial window to the late squire. The reredos in question was an elaborate structure of marble and tile, in which were floreated niches designed and executed to contain nothing, and exquisitely sculptured frameworks to enclose blanks. This reredos also, as the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet assured all doubters, had positively no meaning.

Indeed, so scrupulous a man was the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet lest erroneous teaching should be presented to eye or ear of his flock, that he took precautions to teach them nothing at all. He may be said through his pastorate to have dealt with sacrament and ceremony as boys do with eggs. Having blown out all their contents, he bade his parishioners thank Heaven that it was their

glorious, their precious privilege to possess in their beloved church a museum of empty shells.

Mrs. Jane had her eye on the manorial pew that occupied the south chancel aisle. As long as she had been squiress she had not taken her place in it, as duty had called and glued her to the organ-stool, save on saints' days, when there was no choir. As Miss Pamphlet, daughter of the rector, she had drilled the choir, and had played the instrument that accompanied their voices. She did not resign her post, when she became lady of the manor, to schoolmaster, mission-woman, or scripture-reader, for the first could not manipulate an instrument; the mission-woman, on principle, would play Gregorian music only; and the evangelist, also on principle, nothing but Moody and Sankey. Consequently the squiress had maintained her place as teacher of the singers and organist throughout her reign, and had never consciously desired to resign it for the more dignified and dominating position in the squirearchical pew under the monuments of many past Curgenvens and the helmet and tabard of Sir Justin Curgenven, the Crusader, that hung below the wall-plate.

Now, however, that her right to occupy this pew was lost, she hankered after it, and was conscious of a consuming bitterness in her heart at the thought that perhaps the place therein that had been hers, had she cared to take it, for seventeen years would now be invaded by a stranger—and such a stranger! That her place—*her* place, the place of Jane Curgenven of immaculate fame, who had never missed a choir practice, been the mainspring of all the parochial activities—should be taken from her by a mere adventuress! Jane Curgenven inadvertently trod on the pedals, and a note that escaped uttered a whine. The boy at the bellows, thinking this was a signal to him to display his energies, began immediately to labour at his lever, and this was followed by bursts of wind from the overladen bellows. Mrs. Jane looked round the angle of the instrument and shook her head at him, when he at once desisted.

Would the person who had married Percival appear in church that day? This was a question in Jane's mind, and she could not resolve whether it would be better for that person to remain away or to appear. If she did not come to church on this her first Sunday at Curgenven, it would be much the same as a proclamation to the parish that she was not a Christian and Churchwoman, or, what was much the same thing, did not care to sit under the Rev.

Mr. Pamphlet. It would be setting a bad example that was certain to be quoted by total and partial abstainers from divine worship, and it would accordingly be furnishing her, Jane Curgenven, with a grievance that she would be justified in making the very most of. It would be a plausible excuse for letting her imagination riot among the forms of heresy and agnosticism and atheism prevalent in the United States, and to speculate which had upset the faith of this individual—that is, supposing she ever had any to be upset. But then, on the other hand, if she did come to church, was it desirable even for the sake of example? Would it not seriously compromise the Church and her father should some dreadful scandal come out relative to this woman's past, or should her moral or social conduct become scandalous in the future? And, again, what good was divine service likely to do to a person of this sort? It could only harden her, deaden her, perhaps puff her up with the thought that she was an admirable member of society and a devout daughter of the Church. Would it not be a sort of sacrilege for a creature of this character to raise her voice in the hymns and psalms, to say 'Amen' to the prayers, and to have the words of her father poured into her ears?

The bell ceased. At once Jane Curgenven rapped on the keys, and the blower bent his back at the bellows. To the strains of 'How beautiful are the Feet' there sailed in the rector, in very full surplice and very full white whiskers, from the vestry and up the aisle, like a large white owl.

When the voluntary was concluded Mrs. Jane Curgenven turned in her seat to listen with one ear to the exhortation, and with one eye to observe the manorial pew. In it she saw the new Mrs. Curgenven standing, in plain navy-blue dress, with simple bonnet with feather and ribbons to match.

'I should have expected her to have been more of a peacock,' mused Jane. 'This kind of people are loud and dressy; but she is acting a part.'

It was remarkable how appropriate psalm and lesson were that day; how they spoke of certain persons being deceitful upon the weights, and lighter than vanity itself; of wandering stars to whom was reserved the blackness of darkness; all of which were of obvious application—so Jane Curgenven thought. Even the rector's sermon had points in it that seemed levelled against the intruder into the manorial pew, which was the more remarkable because the rector took pains to rub down every point that happened to appear

in his discourses, lest it should have by hazard personal application to any one who might chance to be present. There are men, say the Germans, on the further side of the hills, and it was only at such as were beyond sight, and among whom his arrows might fall spent, that the Rev. Mr. Pamphlet ever drew his bow. After the service had been ambled through with decorum, and the Benediction had been spoken with pathos, Jane played a voluntary for the departure of the congregation. That ended, and the stops driven in, she turned on her stool and saw that Mrs. Percival Curgenven had not left the church with the rest, but had waited to retire after all had dispersed. Jane left her seat at the organ as Theresa stepped out of the pew, and both met in the chancel. Jane gave Theresa one of those looks from head to feet that express so much not of compliment but of insult. Then she sniffed, tossed her chin, and strode down the chancel steps, showing the other her back, and that a back that shrugged the shoulders simultaneously, then the right, and next the left; next, the hand, after the glove had been drawn on, was put behind, lifted the skirt and shook it. As Jane entered and passed through the churchyard, her attention was engrossed by the clouds, their shape, their menace of rain, till she had reached the gate opening into the Rectory grounds, when she went through and swung it behind her sharply. To her surprise she heard the click of the hasp after it had been shut, and, turning round, saw that Theresa had entered the rectorial precincts.

The temerity of this proceeding roused Jane's anger. She could not legally forbid Theresa entering the church, but she could eject her from private grounds.

She stopped in her walk, and confronted the new squireess with sternness in her face.

'I beg your pardon: this is not a public walk.'

Theresa halted, and said gently: 'I do not wish to intrude.'

'This is private ground.'

'Then I will retire; but might I have a word?'

'You have probably mistaken the person to whom you wish to address yourself. I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'It is with you I wish to speak.'

'You do me an honour' (spoken in that tone of voice and with an inflection that implied, 'In that you have the advantage of me').

Jane walked leisurely forward, with hand extended to take hold

of the gate and close it, and with a repellent expression that forced Theresa to retreat.

Jane would not pause till she had made Percival's wife draw through the opening in the hedge and rail, and then, planting her feet on the granite threshold that served as a step into the churchyard, she said: 'I am at your service. But we lunch punctually at one on Sundays, and I expect to hear the bell shortly. Can you say your word in five minutes? I fear I cannot afford you a longer space for it. You are, if I mistake not——'

'One woman appealing to another woman,' said Theresa quickly. 'It is the will of Heaven that we should occupy the same parish, and we shall be, as near neighbours, constrained to see a good deal of each other. I am an entire stranger in this place. I have no friends but my husband.' I have, to the best of my knowledge, no relations in the world. You are familiar with the neighbourhood, and are one with the society that is found in it. We both loved the same man—bore the same name—though our lots have been so different. You for many years have occupied that position in which I am now placed—one for which I was not born and to which I never aspired.'

Mrs. Jane raised her eyebrows and pursed up her lips. 'Never aspired!' she repeated.

'No; to which I never aspired,' said Theresa.

'And may I ask to what this preamble leads?'

'I have come as the woman I describe—a stranger, and friendless—to you, at home and amidst friends, to ask whether it is possible that you can receive and help me.'

Jane looked coldly at her. Was this acting, or was it a real appeal?

'I can quite understand,' she said, 'that with such a past as yours you should seek the help of some one to escape into respectable society.'

'I beg your pardon. My past is not one to be ashamed of,' said Theresa with some indignation. 'If you mean my birth, that was my misfortune, not——'

'Oh, I did not allude to your birth; of course you could not help that. I cast no reflection on that.'

'Then what do you mean?'

'There are certain—well, you have been on the stage.'

'Yes, for part of a winter. I was driven to it. I needed bread. Would not you have done the same?'

'I—I would have died first. How dare you suggest such a thing to me?'

'What was the harm?'

'Oh, I do not say that the stage itself is harmful; it is the association. Everyone knows——'

'Everyone does not know,' said Theresa warmly. 'How can you, born in a parsonage, reared under the shadow of the church, living a country life, never associating with any save country people and parsonic families—how can you know anything about the stage?'

'I know this,' said Mrs. Jane: 'the exhalation from a swamp may reach one's nostrils without one having to plunge into it.'

'You have judged partially and unjustly. Excuse my saying so. But, as I said, I was on the stage but for one short period—half a season—and that only because, in the first place, I must have done something in order to live, and, in the next, I took the place of one who from sickness fell out of her engagement. In the difficulties in which the company was situated I was asked to supply her place, and the fact that she was not fulfilling her engagement preyed on her mind. To satisfy her, I went in her place. Before that, and after that, I never performed. And that person whose place I supplied was my dear present husband's first wife.'

'I thought as much!' exclaimed Jane, with a tone of triumph in her voice.

'What! that I took her place?'

'Oh dear no! but that she had been no better than——'

'She was a lovable, patient person, who was the bread-winner when, for the time, Mr. Percival Curgenven was without work. I knew her and I valued her.'

'"Birds of a feather,"' muttered Jane to herself.

'But that is neither here nor there. You did not know her and her merits. I did. Because I loved and valued her, Percival has taken me. Now to the point. Will you be kind to me? My position is difficult.'

'Kind I will be,' said Jane Curgenven haughtily, 'but you must excuse me if I say that we can never be more than acquaintances, without one atom of sympathy between us. We belong to different worlds of thought and feeling. I could not make a friend of you if I would. It is not merely that affair of the stage, which you try to explain away, that forms an insurmountable barrier. You know very well there was that other matter.'

‘What other?’

‘It is idle to pretend not to understand me. That scandalous, that infamous attempt on my poor dear lost husband!’

‘Scandalous! infamous attempt! He was my husband.’

‘That I never will admit.’

‘But I can produce the most unimpeachable testimony, or rather, I could do so if I cared.’

‘Can and could are different moods.’

‘If I have not done so, it was out of consideration for you. If I do not do so, it is because there is nothing to be gained by it.’

‘Oh, pray do not consider me!’

‘I acted on your father’s request. There was not any advantage to myself to be reaped by establishing my marriage, and it would have brought distress on Mr. Pamphlet, and pain and humiliation on yourself.’

‘You were mighty kind!’

‘And even now I could satisfy you if you wished. I have Lambert’s letters to me.’

Mrs. Jane flared up. ‘For Heaven’s sake! He is dead. What may have been your relations to one another in Malta or Corfu, or wherever it was you caught him, poor inexperienced fellow, in your deadly toils, I do not wish to ask. I *will* not inquire. There are certain poisonous combinations which it is deadly to look into. I do not know what Lambert may have written when young and foolish and without strong principles; what I do know is that after he became my husband he was a God-fearing and a moral and honourable man.’

‘There is one thing more,’ said Theresa, her heart beating with indignation. ‘I have reasons to suppose that he did sign a paper that practically admitted his marriage to me—’

‘I know what you mean,’ interrupted Jane. ‘Physic spoke about it to me. That man is a scoundrel. He is capable of anything. I can quite believe that a will has been forged for the sake of whitewashing Lambert’s temporary connection with yourself. Physic hinted something about this: it was to restore Curgenven to me and my daughter on the condition that we admitted that I—that she—I cannot even speak it. The thing was too infamous. Physic owes me a spite. He has done it out of malice, and perhaps in connivance with other interested parties.’

‘Who could they be? Not I; for if such a will existed and were proved Percival and I would be thrown into poverty again.’

'Oh, I don't stoop to inquire who contrived the matter. I do not care to unravel these mysteries.'

'And do you mean to say that you would refuse reinstatement in Curgenven Manor at such a price?'

'Most certainly. I will never connive at villainy. There goes the gong: I must to lunch.'

'Then friendship you cannot give me?'

'I cannot do the impossible. Between me and you there is a great gulf fixed, and we cannot shake hands across it.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INVENI PORTUM.

THERESA remained in the churchyard. Jane Curgenven had closed the gate in her face, and had gone off to her lunch.

She seated herself wearily on a flat tombstone. The clerk had departed and none of the congregation remained around the church. They had all gone to their midday meal. The yard was therefore as solitary as it was likely to be at midnight.

Theresa's brain was on fire and a load of lead was on her heart. With her lay the decision of a momentous question, whether the will of the late Captain Lambert Curgenven was to be produced or not.

She understood the reason why Physic had objected to her consulting her husband. Percival was a man to decide offhand on any question by its superficial merits. On the surface, unquestionably, this case was simple enough. A will had been made, and therefore ought to be produced. To make away with such a document was felony, involving penal servitude. But what might be criminal by law need not be wrong in morals. There was much below the surface qualifying this question and making it difficult of solution, because complicating it with obligations to the wishes of living persons and with consideration for the memory of the dead.

If that will were to make its appearance, it would act as a bomb of dynamite thrown into Curgenven, carrying disaster and dismay on all sides.

Theresa had no great pity for Jane Curgenven, and no overwhelming regard for her father, but she knew that no blow could

search out and cut to the quick their self-esteem, which was their prevailing if not their only passion, more cruelly than were she by means of this document to expose the real position Jane Pamphlet had held, and to deprive her of every title to be called by any other than her maiden name, and to bastardise her child. How terrible for the mother to have to inform her daughter that they could no longer bear the name that they had worn with such confidence! Not at any price, not certainly at that of reinstatement in Curgenven, would Jane submit to such shame. To be Miss Jane Pamphlet, squires of Curgenven, would be to her worse than to have to fly to a desert island and there hide her dishonour.

Notwithstanding the rudeness, the unkindness Theresa had encountered, she shrank from causing Jane so much distress; she was unable to refuse a certain amount of admiration for the resolution with which this woman shut her ears and blinded her eyes to unpleasant facts, and by denying them thought she deprived them of their right to be facts. But all Jane's resistance and pertinacity in refusing to see what was unpleasant could avail her nothing were the will established. It would be as the mistress, and not as the wife, of the late Captain Lambert that Jane could alone inherit Curgenven, at the same time that she resigned to the woman she looked upon as the dirt under her feet the honourable title of wife which she had so long borne.

Theresa, moreover, pitied the old rector, who had stalked so complacently on his stilts, a head taller morally than everyone else; pitied him when she thought how the truth, if made public, would bear him down. The truth he had been obliged to admit, and for the sake of concealment had been ready to waive all claims of his daughter and granddaughter on the Curgenven estate. But he might admit it to his own heart and remain on his stilts. If it became public he would come down, stilts and all.

Theresa thought also of her husband, of the ease and happiness that seemed to enhalo his later life. In the vigour of youth, in the strength of manhood he had made a botch of life; was it likely that he would be able to earn his living when he had turned the corner of his career? The desultory, erratic habit was inbred. He had not, under stress of necessity, been able to buckle to serious and steady work in the first half of life; was he likely to do so, to reveal energy and show perseverance in the second stage?

She thought of Justinian. The boy had had his education neglected. His father had made him as himself, or had done his

best to do so. A boy of generous disposition and warm heart ; one who was cut out by nature to be a good country squire whose object in life is sport. But he was fit for nothing else. If forced to work for his living, there was every chance of his making as little way as had his father. But then Justinian was young, and not completely formed ; there might be entertained hope for such, and Theresa did not spend much thought on him.

It was otherwise with the memory of the testator. Was she to reveal him to the world in an ugly light ? Was it not her duty as his widow to be careful of his reputation, to save him from becoming the topic of conversation in every house between Liskeard and Launceston ? What sort of comment would be passed on him ? What could men and women say of the man who had so lightly deserted one wife, and without taking proper pains to ascertain whether she were alive or dead, had married another, and that the daughter of the most highly respected clergyman in the district ? What could be said of the man who left the hateful secret to be disclosed after his death, because he was too great a coward to face the consequences of its being known whilst he was alive ?

Theresa had little doubt in her mind that Lambert had committed suicide. No one else thought so save Physic. But were the truth to be known about his relations to her and Jane, everyone would conclude that he had shot himself to escape exposure. He had shot himself. His punishment had fallen on him. Theresa could enter into his mind and weigh the agony of remorse, the doubt, the desperation that tore him, when he ran into the Bungalow, took down the pistol, loaded it, and applied the muzzle to his head. He had suffered the penalty of his acts. Let that suffice. Let his memory remain unsullied by any act of hers. Let her stand between him and the revelation that would blast his name.

And, lastly, she thought of herself.

A qualm came over her. She had striven to obtain her livelihood, and had met with as little success as Percival, who had lounded. She had become overweared with the incessant strain, never pretermitted for a day, the strain to hold her own, to maintain her proper level, and not to sink exhausted on the ground, lay her head in the dust, and let the heart out of utter weariness cease to perform its function. At length, in ripe years, she had been able to seat herself and look forward to rest.

There was a picture that she knew well, and understood as

perhaps did few others. It is in Doré's 'Wandering Jew.' The unfortunate cobbler was doomed to walk till the Last Day. Century after century passes, and night and day the weary man trudges on. Others may sit down, but not he. Others may lay their heads on pillows and fall into dead sleep, but not he. The shoes wear out and re-form on his blistered feet. His muscles are knotted with cramp from overstrain, but may not be relaxed. His eyes are as lead in their sockets, but may not be closed. Then he hears the blast of the trumpet of the Archangel, and at once he sits down and proceeds to kick off his shoes. This is what the artist represents. He has seen into the heart of the utterly fagged-out man. His first, nay, his only thought, at the peal of the trumpet is to sit and be rid of his boots. And Theresa had been on the trudge for nineteen years, and was wearied to the death of it. She had found at length a seat and rest, but only for a moment; the harsh voice of Physic had bidden her tramp on. But not for ever; surely there remained but one struggle more, one on which she had never reckoned, and after that she would have nothing more to fear.

She must find three hundred pounds at once; and she had nothing of her own. In his wonted careless manner Percival had made no settlement on her at his marriage, he had neither promised her anything of her own whilst under coverture, nor assured her anything after his death. He had put his hand into his pocket, or had drawn a cheque when she had desired to buy anything; but that very morning in church Theresa had felt the awkwardness of having no purse and allowance of her own, for there had been a collection in behalf of some charity, and she had had no money to put into the plate.

She would have to obtain the three hundred pounds from Percival without being able to tell him for what she required the sum. She shrank from asking this; she was uncertain how he would take it; she feared lest it should occasion a difference, lest he should refuse her the money, or lest he should give it with reluctance and suspicion. It was a large sum to require without her being able to explain her need for it.

As she mused, her finger unconsciously traced the letters engraved in the slate of the tombstone on which she was seated. She now looked at the inscription. It ran :

*Inveni portum ; spes et fortuna valete,
Nil mihi vobiscum : ludite nunc alios.*

She was a sufficient scholar to make out the sense. What! was the grave the only harbour of refuge for the storm-tossed? Were hope and fortune making their sport of her for a brief period, then to desert her?

She put her hand to her brow, that was throbbing as if it would burst. Then Percival, who had approached unobserved, unheard, over the turf of the churchyard, said: 'My dear, why have you not come to lunch? By Jove! it is new to me to say "lunch." I have been accustomed to dine at one o'clock, and have cold something and cheese in the evening for supper. Bathsheba's supreme effort was always for the midday meal.'

'I did not consider I should be wanted,' said Theresa.

'My dear, you are always in request when not present—not by me only. Justinian has been calling out for you. Are you not very well?'

'No, Percy, not that, but worried.'

'Gracious! what have you to worry you?'

'The usual worry. What troubled you in old days.'

'I was always short of money,' answered Percival readily. 'But that can't fret you now.'

'It does; I have nothing. There was a collection in the church this morning, and I had not a penny in my pocket.'

'Why did you not ask me before?'

'I did not know there would be a collection.'

'It doesn't matter. I'll send five bob to the old pomposity. What was it for?'

'I—I really do not recollect.'

'It does not matter. I'll send the five bob.'

'Yes, Percy, but that does not satisfy me. It is very awkward for me to be without cash.'

'What do you want, T.?'

Percival Curgenven put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of copper and silver.

'I say, I have no gold here. But I can make up a sovereign in silver. And that will be all the better, T., because then you will have plenty of small change.'

'Thank you, Percival, but that does not exactly meet my requirements.' She rose from the tomb and laid her hand on his arm. 'I want more than that. It seems mean of me to ask it. I owe you everything, dear; you have been so good to me.'

Oh, stuff! it is I who am laid under obligation.'

'Well, there are circumstances that oblige me to ask you to make me an allowance. May I ask you to give me a certain sum, to deal with just as I like, to spend or to hoard as suits my fancy; to go to when I want something very much, without having to come with the bill to you?'

'Certainly. But don't bother about that now.'

'Yes, Percy, I must. You see I may need money at any moment. To-morrow is Monday. Might I have my allowance to-morrow in a cheque?'

'Certainly you shall. Come along to feed. There is some very nice lobster salad, uncommonly well made. Our new cook is a first-rater.'

'Then I may have the cheque to-morrow?'

'Yes, T., for how much? I dare say I could get you some gold by scraping about, if you want ready money.'

'I should like——' Then her heart failed her, and with her heart her powers. She sank back on the tombstone. The sum was so great. She was sick at heart.

'My dear husband,' she said in a timid voice, 'do you recall what I said when you proposed to me? I said then that it was possible, situated as I was, that certain persons might turn up and assert claims on me——'

'What, some relations have manifested themselves? Where are they? Ask them to lunch. Leave all that to me.'

'I cannot, Percy. I warned you then, but I did not then think it could happen, but what I feared has come about, though in a most unforeseen manner. I must have three hundred pounds to satisfy someone who otherwise could cause both of us great annoyance.'

'He has begun at once, upon my word he has! But don't let these fellows bother you. Pass them on to me. I'll satisfy them with my walking-stick.'

'No, no, Percy. This is a real claim. I cannot explain its nature to you. I cannot tell you any particulars about the person who makes the demand. All I can say is that, unless I find the money, I shall be put to great unhappiness that may be permanent.'

'You shall have the money; but it is a large sum.'

'And then you will not inquire what becomes of it.'

Percival was evidently uneasy.

'Is this the first and last demand?'

'It is the first; I hope, I do hope it will go no further.'

‘I’ll make it four hundred,’ said her husband; ‘at any rate for this year; then there is a hundred for yourself over. But, T., don’t let this be tried on again, or I shall have to interfere. There is no satisfying bloodsuckers. Is it someone who pretends cousinship?’

‘I said I could tell you nothing.’

‘All serene. I won’t ask. But, I say, T., I hope the lobster salad will be as good when we get to it as it was when I started after you.’

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CIVILISATION AND SAVAGERY.

AFTER this scene in the churchyard, Theresa was aware of a slight diminution in cordiality in her husband. He was probably unconscious of it himself, but the freshness, the frankness of confidence between him and his wife were gone. He endeavoured to be cheery and amiable as usual, but there was evident to her eye an effort on his part to seem as he had been. A jar in the perfect harmony that had reigned between them had taken place, a drop of bitterness had fallen into the cup out of which both drank. A little germ of suspicion had entered into his heart, there to ferment. A tendency to decline was noticeable in the barometer that marked even weather. Theresa was alive to this, and unhappy. A fire burnt in her heart, a fire of resentment against Physic, who was the occasion. He had come to mar her happiness, which had otherwise been complete. She might have been content, had she felt confident that the three hundred pounds she had obtained for him were sure to suffice, and that he would no further press for money; but her fear was that this was but the beginning of a series of exactions, and that the result would be estrangement between her husband and herself. Percival would reasonably ask for whom and for what purpose these demands were made, and if she refused to tell him, and refuse she must, he would be filled with vague and disquieting suspicions that would destroy confidence between them, and seriously jeopardise the continuance of his affection.

And the man who was bringing this blight on her life was Physic. Her bosom heaved, her heart swelled. She clenched her hands. She hated him. She had been walking through the grounds,

now she opened the wicket-gate and went out on the moor, and was suddenly aware of a girl who was dodging among the trees and behind the hedges.

Theresa halted in her walk and watched the girl, who, when she saw she was observed, came from her hiding and sauntered along the down, then stopped and turned to see whether Theresa were still looking at her. When she was aware that she continued to engage attention, she turned abruptly and came towards her.

Theresa was struck by the easy grace of the girl, by the elasticity of her tread, the flexibility of her upright body, and the beauty of her flowing red-gold hair. There was a sullen, peevish expression in her handsome face. She stepped up to Theresa and said: 'Why do you look at me? What do you want? Are you his new mother?'

Theresa smiled: 'I think I have heard of you. My husband, Mr. Curgenven, has mentioned your name. You are Esther Morideg.'

'Yes, I am. Is there any hurt in that?'

'None at all. I was very sorry to hear that you had been turned out of your cottage by Mr. Physic. Have you found a new home?'

'No. We are in a linney, a bit.'

'I will come and see you some day, and perhaps I may be able to take your grandmother something that will help to make her comfortable.'

'Oh, gran'fer and gran'mother don't want nothing but to be let alone. Us was well enough till Physic came and turned us out. I say, be you the squire's new wife?'

'Yes, I am Mrs. Curgenven.'

'I say, where is the young squire? Why ha'n't he been nigh us? I want to see'n, I do, cruel bad.'

'What for? Is there anything I can do for you?'

'You? No.'

'Then why do you want him?'

The girl looked irresolutely at her, then dropped her eyes. She caught her skirt and played with it, plucking with both hands and shuffling with her feet in the short grass.

'I do want to see'n, I do.'

'For what reason?'

The girl stamped impatiently. 'I ain't got no reasons. I ha'n't see'n for four days—there—wi'n't that do? I reckon he's been to the pass'nage, he has; he've been wi' Miss Alice, sure

enough.' She raised her head, her cheeks were on fire. 'Well, I reckon and so he ort, but for all I want to see'n cruel bad, I do; so there now!'

'Esther,' said Theresa, 'would you like to come with me and see Curgenven house and gardens? I will show them to you.'

'Yes, I would. That other, the ou'd squiress, her turned me out; her wouldn't let me have tea wi' the childer, nor see nort. Her were a hard 'un.'

'Then come with me, Esther; I will show you everything.'

'Is he at home?'

'If you mean Mr. Justinian,' said Theresa, becoming more grave, 'he is not.'

The girl hesitated, but finally resolved to accept the offer. 'Come along then,' she said, with a swing of her body in the direction of the house.

The thoughts of Theresa were for awhile diverted from her own troubles. This wild moor-girl interested her. She also was a victim to Physic's unscrupulousness. As these two walked side by side, Theresa knew that she was herself menaced by that man with the like treatment that had been administered to Esther. One had been driven out of her home, the other was threatened with expulsion. The thought of this drew Theresa to her strange associate. But another consideration urged her to make Esther's acquaintance. Percival had told her how he had come upon Justinian with the girl at the cross on the moor-edge, and of his own uneasiness on that head.

Theresa and Esther were both waifs out of the evenly flowing stream of common social life. Neither had much to boast of in parentage. Both suffered from not belonging to the great bulk of settled humanity that knows all about itself and its belongings on all sides, that has grown on one spot, and has come to share the opinions and prejudices and likings of surrounding humanity, as insects and birds take the colours of the foliage in the midst of which they dwell. Esther in her own sphere was as much shunned and despised as Theresa knew she would be in the sphere into which she had been taken up. She felt a pity for the girl, and kindly interest in her, and Theresa looked at Esther's face with curiosity as she walked at her side.

It was a handsome face, with boldly cut features, a broad forehead, with fine hazel eyes under the arched brows; the mouth was singularly delicate, and the chin fine for one in her class of life.

The face was one of generous impulse ; of strength and weakness in equal combination, of defiance and fear, of rudeness and refinement.

‘I say,’ the girl turned on Theresa, ‘do’y like him now?’

‘Whom? Mr. Justinian? Indeed I do. I like him very much.’

‘There now,’ said Esther, with light flashing in her face, ‘I be main glad o’ that. You don’t seem such a bad ’un. I reckon he were a little out about his father marrying you. But I told’n he couldn’t ha’ everything he liked. I reckon he likes you now he’s come to know you?’

‘Yes, I think so.’

‘There, I be glad o’ that.’ She took Theresa’s hand in hers and patted it with the other. ‘He and Miss Alice be my best friends; and I reckon, if you behave yourself, you shall be another. I likes your face, I do.’

‘Thank you, Esther,’ said Theresa with a smile. ‘Here we are at the house. Come in.’

‘No; there now, I be ’most ashamed.’ The girl hung back. ‘It be so terrible fine.’

‘There is no one to alarm you. You and I can go through the rooms together. We shall find no one there; Mr. Curgenven and Master Justinian have gone out shooting together.’

The girl looked at the house with mistrust. She wished to see the interior, and yet was shy of entering. She was conscious of the incongruity of her own appearance in rough homespun with the refinement and beauty of the interior.

When she entered the hall she kicked off her shoes, afraid to walk in them on the polished oak floor. She put her hands behind her back, and looked at the walls hung with family portraits, and at the flowers on a stand in the middle.

‘Who be all they?’ she asked, with her eyes on the pictures.

‘Those are Curgenvens for two hundred years and more, fathers and grandfathers, back and back, when the dress was very different from what it is now.’

‘I never knowed who my father was,’ said Esther.

‘Nor do I who was mine,’ said Theresa.

‘Now, you don’t say so!’ The girl drew to the side of Mrs. Curgenven.

Theresa led Esther into the dining-room, where the table was spread with white linen, and glittered with glass and silver. The girl looked steadily at the table for a while, then went to it and

took up a dessert spoon. 'I reckon this be silver,' she said. 'Why, what a lot of shillings be in her!'

'Yes; I dare say ten or twelve.'

'What do you have 'em about for? 'B'ant y' afeard folks 'll steal 'em?'

'Oh no, not here.'

'I would hide 'em up the chimley, under the drexil. Don't y' now let ou'd Physic see 'em, or he'd never let y' be easy till he'd gotten them all. He's as great a thief, for certain sure, as any o' them chaps as be shut up in Bodmin gaol.'

'Would you like anything to eat, Esther? I can order you something directly.'

'No, thank y', I couldn't eat here, I'd not know how to do it wi' all these grand things about. I couldn't tell what I had i' my mouth when my eyes was so full of strange sights.'

'Then come with me and you shall see the drawing-room.'

'And what be that for? Sure you've more rooms than you can want. Why should you not sit and talk and do what you've a mind to do here after you've done eatin'? I can't see why you mun ha' a different chamber for everything you do—one to read in, one to talk in, one to eat in, and one to play in. I grant y' it's reasonable to have one to sleep in as is not the same. But all the rest is waste and nonsense. Ay! and you must have a house for smoking 'baccy in too—the Bungalow. 'Tis foolishness. I'm glad I'm not Jan Jeaks' (snail) 'to hev to carry such a house as this on my back. I don't know as it's much to make one happy to have a house. I've not got one; some Physic may come and turn you out. If you've none, why you're free as the air, and nobody can't take nothing from you, like the horniwinks' (plovers).

'How would you like to live in such a house as this?'

'I could not live in it; I should die. It's all very well to look at now and again, but to live in—bless you, I couldn't do it!'

Theresa took the girl into other parts of the house, and then said to her: 'Now, what more would you like?'

'Look'y here now!' said Esther, and drew open her throat, displaying her coral necklace. 'Have you aught like that?'

'I will show you my jewelry—yet not mine—the family jewels. When I am dead they will go to the wife of Justinian.'

She led the girl up the stately Queen Anne staircase, with full-length portraits on it of Curgenvens in powder and wigs, in blue velvet and crimson velvet, of the ladies of the house with

their hair low over their eyes, in shot satins, with pearls about their long necks, and dogs at their sides.

'These,' said Theresa, turning on a landing, 'these are the wives of the Curgenvens, grand and beautiful ladies who never let the sun look on their faces unveiled.'

She conducted Esther to her bedroom, opened a cabinet and produced a jewel-case, unlocked it, and let the evening sun glitter on the diamonds.

The girl took up a necklet and in speechless admiration let it twinkle about her fingers. Then she was shown another of sapphires; rings and bracelets, and brooches and tiaras. Theresa removed her hat and put on some of the jewelry, that the girl might understand how it was worn.

Then suddenly Esther put her hand to her own coral necklace and tore the string so that the coral grains fell about the floor. 'It's just naught at all,' she said.

Theresa knelt and began to collect the strewn members of the necklace. 'You are wrong—altogether wrong,' said she. 'Esther, this coral looks charming on your pretty neck; it suits you admirably. But these diamonds and pearls would make you ridiculous. You could not wear them.'

'No; I'd be a dressed-up monkey,' said the girl.

'These will go to Justinian's wife, and will suit beautifully her delicate skin and her refined beauty.' As Theresa spoke, she felt over the floor for more pieces of coral. 'She will be a lady like those you saw on the stairs. Some of these jewels were worn by them, and suited them, as you could see in the paintings. Justinian's wife will be painted some day in the same style, and hung with the others. I dare say she will be quite as noble and lovely a lady as any of them. She will be very happy in this grand house, and will know exactly what to do in it—in each of the rooms; know all as a matter of course, because she was bred to it. And she will play the piano and make sweet music——'

'Why are you saying all this?' asked Esther uneasily.

'Esther, my dear,' continued Theresa, without noticing her interruption, 'it would be dreadful to Justinian to lose all this, to be poor, to have to live in a linney, to eat without silver forks, and lie in fern and heather, and not have servants to wait on him. It would be as strange to him, such a life as yours, as it would be strange to you to live such a life as his.'

'I reckon it would.'

The girl was turning a pearl necklace about her brown bare arm.

‘See!’ she said; ‘don’t this look comical?’

‘It does. But are you attending to what I say?’

Esther laid the string of pearls aside in the case. ‘There,’ she said, ‘look it all up again. I’ve seen enough of them. I don’t want to see them no more.’

‘I will do so, and put them aside for Justinian’s wife, as I am not likely to wear them. I was not born to such a place as this, and so I cannot wear them. Now, Esther, tell me the truth. Why were you hiding among the trees when I came through the park? For whom were you looking? On whom waiting?’

The girl hung her head and turned it aside.

‘You need not answer me,’ said Theresa; ‘I know. You were hoping to meet Justinian.’

‘If I were, there’s no harm in that;’ with a toss of the hair and a slight tone of defiance.

‘It will not do, dear Esther; indeed it will not. You never can properly be Justinian’s companion. How can you, when he lives in such a house as this, and you, as you say, in an old stable?’

The girl put up her arms and dropped her face between them.

‘It is this that I wished to say to you,’ pursued Theresa, ‘that you two can be friends only at a distance. You see now that it is not possible for you to be his wife. You never could shape yourself to live in this place. On the other hand, you could not drag him away to your wretched hovel. He would be infinitely miserable there. And, Esther, you can be a friend to the young squire only at a long distance. Do you understand? I speak seriously. There is one thing to a woman above everything precious—her honour. Treasure that, dear child. Never risk that. Lose that, and though the noblest in the land you are vile as dirt. Preserve it, and you stand as high as a princess. I am anxious for you, I am anxious for him. He is generous; he is careless. You are generous and inconsiderate—’

The girl threw herself passionately on the floor as she would have done on her native heath, and still burying her face in her arms, and turning it to the carpet, sobbed: ‘I love him, I do; I love him!’

(To be continued.)

NATURE STUDIES.

BY A SON OF THE MARSHES.

As a child I had two great desires, and I do not remember indulging particularly in any other: one was that when I grew up I might paint pictures of the wild things that surrounded my lonely home, the other that I might have money enough to buy books about them. I am thankful to say that both these longings have been in a great measure gratified. In my wildest day-dreams, however, I never aspired to writing myself about the creatures. That has come about since my hair turned grey and my hot blood has cooled down a little. I am sure of one thing, that a man who lives amongst the so-called working-classes, and who has also unrestricted intercourse with foresters and the more intelligent rustics, has opportunities for gaining a real insight into wild life such as many a student of nature, who may have been what is from the world's point of view more fortunate in the circumstances of his life, cannot have.

Said one to me lately, 'I have read your books. But do you really see all those things when you walk about?'

'Not in the streets of Dorking town,' I replied.

'Because really, my dear sir, do you know that in all the time that I have been in this neighbourhood I have never seen a tithe of what you have written about.'

The old story of 'Eyes and No Eyes,' I said to myself; also that if some folks had eyes at the back of their heads, as well as in front, they might wander far and see little.

Another man observed that, although he had ridden in a cart for many years in all directions along our high roads, he had never come across any of the creatures I had written about. As the vehicle he used made nearly as much noise in its progress as a goods train might do, it was hardly to be expected that he would.

Readers can easily see that my range is not a wide one, it is only the common objects of the hills, dales, and waters of a limited area that I describe; yet some pains have been necessary even to do that, and in the pursuit of the rail family alone I have often supped with sorrow; while to verify a fact or

two has cost me week after week of hard tramping, many a time. In this way the naturalist fits himself for writing just a small portion of a bird's life. Sometimes the long twenty or thirty miles' walk has been to no purpose, and after giving up the pursuit as a bad job, I have turned my face homewards, and then found the very bird I had gone so far in search of within a twenty minutes' walk of my own door. By patient watchings and waitings, on the part of many different naturalists, fact has been added to fact, until the whole life of a creature furred or feathered has been placed before the public, in order that those whose labours confine them to crowded centres of industry, but who have strong sympathy with life in the open, and the creatures who are able to enjoy it, may understand what are the real lives of the animals and birds.

It is a difficult matter to please some of these would-be students, however, and a short time ago an amusing scene was reported to me. A gentleman, who had read a certain article which had been written by myself, came many miles to see a woodland river and an old weir, the haunt of the otter, which I had there described. When he arrived, however, a band of workmen had unfortunately just finished building a new weir, and they had also cut down all the alders, willows, sedges, and other growth along the river-side, leaving just the stems. This is done every five or six years, as the case may need. Unfortunately he arrived at the place just as the two jobs had been completed. Hither and thither he rushed, until someone asked him if he had lost anything, or if he were looking for someone. Then he gave full vent to his injured feelings; he said, in fact, that he had been swindled—that the writer had drawn very largely on a very fertile imagination. This was perfectly unintelligible to men who knew nothing about such a book having been written. One looked at the other and then touched his forehead, muttering 'Balmy.' This the gentleman heard and naturally resented.

'I have been grossly imposed upon; some people's geese are swans. Where is the old weir?' he asked.

'Just been pulled down and a new un built. Don't ye see it?'

'Why has it been pulled down?'

'Well, if you ask us, they pulled the old un down to build the new un. Any fool can see that.'

'But what a complete swindle—there are no trees here!'

'Maybe you wants to buy the timber and the faggots. If ye do, ye needn't put yerself in a tantrum; none of it aint sold yet.'

Unheeding this, the gentleman went on complaining bitterly; as to owls, he didn't believe there was one of them about the place; and talk about the yikeing laugh of the yaffle, it was sheer humbug.

'What's that you say—no yaffles?' replied one of the men, much amused; 'they're nearly as common as blackbirds in this 'ere park; and owls too, if it didn't happen to be just mid-day. If you was to see them yaffles, and to ask them to holler, I dessay as they'd do it for ye. But do ye know as you're trespassing on this 'ere land?'

'I have come to see some otters.'

'Then you've come on a fool's errand. Did ye think they run about here like sheep. I can git ye one for a suvrin. Ye don't want one? Then you walk off here; for I tell ye, ye are trespassing.'

It was certainly very disappointing for our friend, but rather hard lines that I should be held responsible for his disappointment.

I have received many most kind and sympathetic letters from ardent lovers of the birds, ladies as well as gentlemen, asking me if I would give them the exact localities where I have seen such and such migrants drop in their flight; or where such and such a sequestered pool happens to be situated. Some of these I would fain answer; but I make it a rule not to betray the whereabouts of any of the wild creatures whose secrets I have surprised.

As I said before, it is really hard work watching any members of the rail family; for the cunning of these birds exceeds all belief, and the places they frequent are nothing but quakes. Early in the morning and late in the evening are the times for getting a glimpse of them—that is, if you are lucky in this, for they move about more like rats than birds. Then the midges rise in clouds and sting you most horribly, swamp lands being the abiding places of these insect pests. They form a portion of the daily food of the rails in their nesting time.

And perhaps when you have even offered a rustic, on whose plot of land you want to trespass when in quest of your bird, a sum of money for a small grey and brown bird that you have seen, if they will snare it for you or allow you to snare it—some of their garden plots are only separated from the swamps by a turf

wall—they wonder, and some little diplomacy is necessary ; for they are very tenacious about right of way, and will resent any attempt at trespass, even fiercely.

Many have been my failures compared to my successes in hunting after wild things. Let me describe the haunt of that spotted crake, or, as it is usually called, spotted rail, which after all did *not* come into my hands. A water rail is a bad enough bird to look up ; a spotted rail or crake is worse. Both can run, climb, swim, dive to perfection. Even in thick tangle their movements are as cautious as when they, with coots and moor-hens, visit the gardens on the edge of the swamp from which these have been reclaimed. This they will do in order to pick the hearts out of the ground crops that have just been planted. How they find them out we do not know ; and the mischief is done late in the evening and at night. I have seen them at it many a time, and when the pools or ponds are close to cottages situated on estates this has to be put up with. No shot may be fired, or noose set, where the gentleman in the velveteen suit walks round. I do not intend to enter into this matter ; not being my business, I leave it.

A tramp through meadows, with the Mole twisting in the most erratic manner for three miles, brings us to a clear pool of considerable extent, fringed on one side with dense aquatic tangle. Haying time is over, so we go right up to the bank of tangle from the meadows through which the river snakes. As sedges, bull-rushes, stunted willows, meadow-sweet, alders and loose strife do not enter into the composition of hay, the mowers have simply cut as far as the tangle, leaving that as it was. I know what I am about to suffer before I enter it ; for I have left off smoking, and the day is what the people in and about the fields call a dead-hot day. Not a breath of air is stirring and the 'stouts' bite most ferociously. At this time birds and fish revel in insect food ; it drops down on the water or skims over the surface, and the fish lazily gulp it down ; in fact they are gorged with it.

I have entered the tangle at the thinnest part, for I wish once more to confirm something that I have stated elsewhere, namely, the pike watching for young water birds. If I could see that every day I should not tire of watching it, for the birds know of their danger, and guard against it as well as they can. Not many yards I have crept along, parting the tangle gently to right and left, without making a rustle, getting the backs of my hands covered with midges, whose bites I bear somehow ; then I drop

down and crawl to the edge, looking through a rush tuft which I part for the purpose; and not a yard from me I see a pike—not a large one, for no large fish are here, they do not thrive in this pure spring water. From two to three pounds weight will do, but nothing over that; they are hungry, however, as wolves. There he lies, motionless, just behind some withy roots that run down into the water. Presently there is a ripple on the other side, then another; the fish's fins begin to quiver, but his tail does not move. That quiver of the fins draws him nearer. But there is only a water vole with a bit of sedge in his mouth swimming along, and not the least notice does the fish take of him. Although at other times voles would come to grief, they are safe when young water birds are about.

If I thought fit to go on looking for pike, I should find one watching every few yards. One side of the pool is bordered by open meadows without any tangle. At this season, although very numerous in the water, the pike do not frequent the open; they will come back on that side presently, when no more birds are to be had. From a small puddle some bird rushes, and then flutters broken winged. I know what it means—the bird has young. It is all a sham, but a first-class sham it is; another step, and away go a clutch of young moor-hens, like a lot of black mice on stilts. Willow wrens chide me—I could almost touch some of them—but I press quietly on, smothered by dead tangle and midges, though it will be impossible for me to put up with much more of it. Was that a rat that glided through the bunch of king-cups? No, it shows for one moment, flirting up its tail; it is a spotted crake, the very bird I had tried in vain to get.

Cold spring water was freely used to my face and hands for some time after leaving that pool-side tangle. Birds do not very often come to those who are looking for them; you have to go to them, if you can get there.

It is winter, hard, bitter winter; the snow covers the shingle on the beach above high water-mark; the sky is lead colour, and the water looks like ink, broken at times by the spiteful spit of the crests of the waves, that can barely lift, because the wind is blowing down on them, right on shore. When the waves break, they run up with a hissing noise that tells plainly what is coming.

They rush like huge snakes up to the snow-line on the beach, sending blinding salt spray in all directions; and rush back again,

the stones rattling on the beach as though an express were at full speed there. It is a gale already ; it will be bad presently ; these signs are only preliminary ones, for the waters from the North Sea will come roaring in, a little later, up to the sand downs. A dreary look-out there is—a long stretch as far as the eye can reach of snow—dark sky and darker water. In the foreground are a few blocks of rock, about the height of a man, and behind one of these a fowler is crouching. That great mass of white, about a mile out, is where the wild rush of waters is breaking up in foam on the sand bar. You can hear the howl of it ; not a goose, duck, diver, or wader will be able to rest there, before this gale is over.

Fowls know what is coming ; it is from them, of course, that coast people gain their knowledge, in a great measure, about atmospheric changes. At one time, well within my recollection, the fowls' movements were the only signs they had to go by. Bad as the weather is, fowls are now eagerly feeding on the very edge of the tide—curlews these are. Something moves a whole mob of them, and they rush up shrieking as curlews only can shriek—just over the edge of that hissing surf. Ears and eyes are on the alert ; and as they pass that rock the fowler fires, and eight birds drop in the water. Without one moment's hesitation the gun is dropped in the snow, and he dashes in up to his middle in water ; five he gathers and brings on shore, then he thinks he will strip and swim for the others ; but luckily he is restrained, and the other three birds drift off. I have done foolish things like this in my time, but this was done by a brother naturalist, who has just left us. I admired his pluck, but, being twice his age, I at the same time pointed out that the thing might be done once too often.

In search of birds that frequent salt water and the shores, I have never failed to find some of the various species ; quite sufficient indeed to satisfy me. The plan of proceeding is a very simple one ; certain birds at various seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—frequent particular localities. By knowing these, and going direct to the places, you will find your bird or birds, and no valuable time will be lost in searching. Fashionable watering-places, however, had better have a wide berth given them.

The attitudes that some large birds place themselves in would protect them in comparatively open places. Unless one had seen it, one would hardly give the raptore credit for this ; but they practise it to perfection. This class of birds has been my favourite

study from boyhood, and I shall never be able to finish the study, for something fresh is continually coming before me.

The eagle, for one, places himself in strange positions, a mere bundled up bunch of feathers to look at. A friend of mine who recently visited Achill Island, the island of the eagle, was on the cliffs with his wife and some other friends when the lady saw in a cleft of the rocks close to her what she thought was a splendid tuft of feathers that had been blown there by the wind. On stooping to pick them up, out from the cleft dashed a magnificent eagle, leaving behind him a tuft of feathers as a memento.

Vigilant as the bird is, he is frequently walked over. After gorging he gets drowsy; indeed, it is only under these circumstances that such a thing could take place.

Falcons, hawks—the larger species—can compress their feathers and look very slim, if they think it necessary to do so. As to the owls, they can hump up into any position they think most suitable. It is useless to look for these self-preserving traits in any of the family kept in zoological collections, for the birds are so accustomed to see large numbers of people passing and re-passing, or standing in front of them, that they treat the whole matter with perfect indifference. They know that at a certain time their food will be brought them, and that they are otherwise perfectly safe. Then the raptorial birds in a wild state have a bloom on their plumage, like the bloom on a bunch of grapes, which is not often seen when in captivity.

There is a sameness to be seen in the habits and haunts of all shore birds, no matter where they may be. All shore-shooters know this and compare notes about it. Flats of soft ooze are the same in one locality as another, and beach is beach. As to the sand dunes, or sand hills, they are all alike in general features, go where you will; the only difference is that some are of very great extent, and some comparatively speaking small. One instance out of many that I have witnessed will prove how completely a bird's plumage may mimic the surroundings that it lives and nests in.

We are standing between broken hills of the sand dunes; great humps there are, that will topple over during some high tide, for the swirl of the waters has washed the worn bases of several nearly through. In between, large patches of purple-grey shingles have been washed. I have called them purple-grey, as this is the general tone of them; but broken shells, white pebbles, and the thousand

and one atoms of flotsam and jetsam that litter the foreshore make a glitter that is very deceptive, if you wish to pick matters out in detail.

Tufts of marum, or bents, for this creeping, wiry, grass-like growth is called by either name, hold on where there is the least chance; if I were asked to give this a name, I should call it sea couch—for it will couch and hold on anywhere. A most valuable ally it is where it is found; it binds the sand dunes by its network of creeping roots. This, with sea holly, sea thistles, sand convolvuli, and a few tufts of blite, is all the vegetation that grows here.

Pools of water left in some hollows by the last storm glitter in the sun; so clear is this very salt water that a pin could be seen at the bottom of the deepest pool. If you turn your eyes inland there are the rabbit links, and as we are in the hollows that is all we can see in one direction. Looking seawards we see a vast flat of sand, for the tide is out. A solitary gull flaps overhead, the only form of life that shows itself. It has a beauty, although a weird one, this great sand-flat with the dunes as a border to it; but I should not care to spend a day here alone. Others have visited the place and made the same remark, for the strange shapes into which the water had formed the sand hills, some of them fallen, and others ready to fall, used to give me the impression that a small part of our island had been utterly wrecked.

The ringed dotterels nest here; as we tramp over the shingle two rise right in front of us and settle on a sandy knoll near; we can just make them out, and that is all. Then they pitch on some beach a few yards away, and we do not see them again; all our creeping, hiding, and waiting will not benefit us one bit. Still we do not like to be beaten if we can help it, and we try again, but all to no purpose; then just as we are leaving the birds flit up on one side of us, and we are baffled.

If anyone of our readers will visit the New Natural History Museum at South Kensington, in the fine room filled with splendid cases of British birds he will find a case of dotterels and their young on some beach shingle. They are perfect in their setting up, even in the most minute details. When looking at these he will see at the first glance what I have endeavoured to explain here; and that is why dotterels and their young are invisible on shingle.

MARY.

THE room was almost in darkness, for the flickering fire in the small grate only threw a fitful light on the narrow bed with its silent occupant and the bare walls, and the round table covered with a ragged cloth; yet it did not need the sunshine to show the poverty which characterised the apartment.

There was no sound except the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece.

Presently, however, there came a quick knock at the door, and without waiting for an answer a girl pushed it open and entered.

The woman in the bed stirred, and said feebly: 'Is that you, my dear?'

'Yes, Mrs. Dowie,' said the new comer; 'it's me.'

Her voice was young and sweet and clear, but a quicker ear than that of the old woman would have detected its excessive weariness.

'You're all in the dark, I see.'

'Yes,' said the old woman, raising herself slowly on her elbow, and groaning as she did so. 'I'm in the dark. It ain't much use me burnin' candles, my dear. I can't read, nor nothing. Oh, my bones, my bones! Oh, I do ache!'

'Are you worse to-day, Mrs. Dowie?'

'About the same, my dear; not worse, not better. I shan't be much better till the cold weather set in, and then I trust I shall go Home. It won't be very long, I'm hoping. I'm useless enough. I'm very anxious to be gone, very anxious.'

'You're not useless, Mrs. Dowie,' said the girl gently, though in the same tired voice. 'You're a comfort to me. I like to come and see you. You're the one person I trust and believe in.'

'Ah, my dear, you're too young to talk that way,' said Mrs. Dowie. 'Oh, my poor back!' She groaned. 'I can't rest noways,' she went on. 'If I lie I aches, and if I set I aches. All the night I'm awake what with the cough and the pain.'

'And don't you get any rest in the day, Mrs. Dowie?'

The old woman shook her head.

'No,' she said, 'it's the bones, you see. I've the same bones by day as by night. Oh dear, dear, dear! You'll forgive me complainin'.'

'Poor thing, you have reason to,' said the girl sympathetically.

'P'raps you'll read to me a bit?'

'Yes; I'll light the candle, shall I?'

'If you please, my dear.'

The girl, who had been standing by the bedside, moved to the fire, then she lit a piece of paper and held it to the tallow candle in the broken candlestick. From her pocket she took a little prayer-book, and began to read aloud the psalms for the day.

The light of the candle fell on her face and on that of the old woman, and threw grotesque shadows on the distempered wall. The two women were in strange contrast to one another. Age and illness and excessive thinness had made Mrs. Dowie hideous. She had lost her teeth, and her mouth had fallen in; she had a high nose and a very protruding chin, and both were sharpened almost terribly; her eyes were sunken and hollow, and her scant grey hair strayed from beneath the crochet nightcap which she wore. Her thin hands with long uncut nails lay out on the counterpane. She was propped up by a pillow and a shawl, and over her night-gown was thrown an old moth-eaten fur cloak.

The girl who was reading to her was sufficiently far removed from a lady to be called ladylike. She was neatly dressed in black and wore a large straw hat with red berries on it. She had pale cheeks and long-lashed grey eyes and a pretty drooping mouth. In repose the face was pathetic. The thin lips, when set together, gave it, however, a hard look which detracted from its charm, and the somewhat piquant nose and chin might become nut-crackers, like those of the old woman, when the softness of youth had departed.

Mary Curtis was a dressmaker by profession. She had earned her own living since her parents died, and she was now four-and-twenty. She lived by herself in one room in a little street leading out of Burdett Road in Mile End, but she was so respectable that no one ever said a word against her character. She went to a shop in Whitechapel, for which she made dresses, every morning and came back at six or seven most evenings. Her time was so fully occupied that she could not have much opportunity to visit the sick, even if she had desired to do so. But Mrs. Dowie was the

grandmother of her great friend Jessie, who had worked with her ever since she had been apprenticed. The two had been inseparable, but a year ago Jessie had died of the influenza, and it seemed a natural thing for Mary to try to fill her vacant place in the life of the poor lonely creature who was left. Mrs. Dowie was allowed half-a-crown a week from the parish. Jessie had helped to eke out this pittance. Now, Mary gave her occasional aid. She bought such little delicacies as she could afford. It was a pleasure to her to do this. Jessie had been more than a sister to the sisterless orphan, and besides, Mary was fond of Mrs. Dowie for her own sake. The old woman was patient on the whole. And she was very grateful to Mary, and looked forward to her daily visit as *the* pleasure of her dreary life. Mary had a respect for Mrs. Dowie. She was not a particularly religious girl herself, though she was upright and honest, but she had a great reverence for those who professed religion. She admired Mrs. Dowie, because the latter liked to hear the psalms, and could extract comfort from them. She thought her almost a saint.

Certainly Mrs. Dowie seemed to enjoy the reading. She closed her eyes, and the expression of her face temporarily redeemed its ugliness. It was as if an inner light shone upon it. Now and then when Mary paused, she said in a whisper, 'It's beautiful,' and when the girl finally laid down the book she looked at her with her dim eyes and said, 'God bless you!'

When Mary had put the book back in her pocket she sat quite still for a while, her small hands with the pricked fingers lying loosely on her lap. Opposite to her, nailed on the wall, was its one adornment. It was a black-edged card on which were stamped white angels with drooping wings; and between the angels was written :

In memoriam.
Jessie Mabel Dowie,
Who entered into rest
October 3rd, 1890.

Aged twenty-three years, ten months.
'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.'

Mary could not see the words on the card, but she knew them by heart. Had she not chosen and paid for them herself, and was there not one hanging in her own little room at home?

Presently she said sorrowfully :

'It seems a very long time.'

'What do, my dear?'

'Since she died. So many things have happened.'

'Jessie was the best girl I ever knew. And what does she have for it all? She fell in love with a man as wasn't good enough for her; and when they'd walked two years she had to give him up along of his bad habits. Then she was always worrying as to if it was right and wouldn't look at anyone else; and then she died. There are lots of bad girls, lots, who are happier than Jessie was.'

The old woman shook her head.

'You know more about it than me, my dear,' she said. 'Jessie weren't one to talk much. I think she's happy now. She was always one to cling to religion.'

'Yes,' said Mary softly. 'The little prayer-book had belonged to Jessie.'

She got up suddenly.

'I'm going,' she said. 'I can't do you any good to-night. I'm tired and cross.'

She bent over the bed and kissed the unlovely face. Then she extinguished the light and went downstairs and homeward.

Her own room on the top story of the house was very small, but it was neat and even pretty. The chair-bedstead and the table covered with a red cloth were quite nice pieces of furniture; and a bright-coloured shawl hid the dress and jacket which were hanging on the door. Mary could not realise her ideals of house decoration, but she did her best. On the mantelpiece was a vase Jessie had given her; there were autumn leaves and berries in it. There was also a portrait in an adjustable frame. It had been taken two years ago, one Bank holiday, by a man at Leytonstone, where she and Jessie had gone in the tram. It was not a flattering likeness of either of them. Certainly it did not do Mary justice. But it was the only photograph there was of the dead girl. Mary would not have parted with it for love or money.

When she had lit the lamp her eyes turned almost involuntarily to this portrait. Jessie and she had so often spent their evenings together that she looked naturally to this poor substitute for the living friend when she was specially in need of her. Now she walked up to the mantelpiece and stood for awhile gazing steadily at the inartistic representation of the common-looking young woman in which there was no trace of the sweetness of expression which had made Jessie's charm. Gradually Mary's eyes filled and her mouth quivered. At last she began to cry

softly; and presently she went down on her knees on the ground and hid her face in the low chair where Jessie had so often sat.

'Oh,' she said aloud, her voice broken by short sobs. 'I do want you, Jess. If you was here I could tell *you*. There isn't anyone else as 'd care or understand. But *you* would. You've been through somethin' like it. And you always knew what to say.

'Jessie,' she continued more softly, almost in a whisper, 'my heart'll break. I've been tryin' not to think all day, and now I can't help it. If I could talk about it I'd feel better. And so I'm goin' to pretend. I'm going to shut my eyes and try to believe you ain't dead, Jessie, but that you're settin' there and want to know. I'm going to pretend I can put my head in your lap and feel your hand smoothin' my hair. It's only make-believe, Jessie dear, like the children do, but I'm so lonely, and it's better than nothing.'

There was a little silence. Mary rose and extinguished the light. It seemed to her that she could talk to Jessie better in the darkness. Then she resumed her former position, and by-and-by the pretty broken voice was heard again. One who listened might well have believed that she had an audience, and an audience in sympathy with her.

'It began just after you died, Jess; a little after Christmas it must have been. I didn't have much heart for goin' out, you know, and I was so wretched without you, many's the time I thought I couldn't have lived on. And one day there was a meetin' over at the hall, and tea. Someone gave me a ticket, and I thought it'd cheer me up a bit. And I went. . . . There was a young man there as had come with Mr. Munns, and he happened to sit near me. You know, Jess, since you'd had your trouble, I didn't have much confidence in men, and I didn't seem to need a sweetheart, havin' you. And p'raps I'm cold. Anyways, I was never one to set myself at men. But this one weren't like them about here. He was like gentlefolks look. And I see he kep' starin' at me, not rude, but as if he was pleased to see me. And I pertended not to see him.

'And afterwards he come and spoke. And we begun to be friends. He was just the sort you'd have liked, Jess. And he said should we keep company? And I told him how it was about you and me, and how I didn't seem as if I could think of sich things then. And he said I had more need of a friend if you was gone. And he looked at me so—kindly, Jess.'

There was a louder sob than those which had preceded it. It is a hackneyed truth that the keenest pain is remembered joy, the greatest loss a recollected gain, when the present has not fulfilled the promise of the past.

'And—we kep' company, Jess. It began gradual. And I seemed to sort of soften. And I was inclined to trust in people more'n I did. And he didn't have any o' the faults I see in the most of men. He didn't drink, nor swear, nor keep hisself untidy. And he could talk of things we'd often wanted to know, books and sich. He was in a carpenter's shop, Jess, and I've heard them of that trade is refineder, just like them as works our way is over factory girls. And he b'longed to clubs where gentlefolk worked, and came and befriended 'em. And he'd caught their tricks. Oh, Jess, it wasn't any wonder as he taught me to care. . . .

'Jess dear. I got to care. I'm cold at times, and hard. But when I love I love faithful. There's you, and your grandma, and him. You've left me, and she'll go afore long. It isn't much wonder as I sort o' clung to him, Jess dear. I don't know as I could have borne them months and the spring and all if there hadn't been something to hope for. I got to look forward to seein' him, to havin' the flowers he'd get, and to walkin' out with him evenings.

'Jess.' Her voice had sunk to a whisper. 'It seemed times as if I was gettin' close to God. The world was different. It weren't all hard and cruel and dirty, and folks with hard hearts and slanderin' tongues, and crimes and sins goin' on, and none to trust to, like it have been sometimes. And what there was hard was easier to be borne. It was a lovely spring, Jess, and a lovely summer. I hadn't forgotten you, dear, and there was a sorrow in my heart for yer, but it were a sorrow that kep' me gentle, not like this that makes me angered, and I sort o' hoped all the while that by-and-by it 'd all be beautiful an' happy. And the autumn came, an' then he told me one day as he loved me, Jess; loved me faithful. . . . And I believed him.

'Jess, hold my hand, I'm comin' to the worst. I can't realise it proper. It was only this mornin' you see. I'll read it to yer, Jess. No, I won't read it, dear. I'll tell you. I'll tell you what was in it—if I can remember, Jess, for it seems to have crushed my life out. It wasn't long, just a few words. He wrote, Jess, that he'd made a mistake, that he'd done wrong, that he hadn't oughter have asked me to marry him, and he took it back. And he

couldn't——' she breathed heavily as with long-drawn sobs— 'couldn't trust hisself to say good-bye, he was goin' for work elsewhere in London, and he believed we'd best part . . . part, Jessie. And we'd been very happy. . . . O, Jess,' she broke off, weeping violently, 'we *had* been happy! But it's all over; and I'll never care for anyone else. Jessie, can't you say *anything*? Tell me you're sorry. My heart is *breakin'*, Jess. Don't you *mind*, Jess? . . . O Jessie, darling, you're *dead*!'

Alas! she could deceive herself no longer. She knew that Jessie would never have let her plead in vain for sympathy if she were by to give it.

When at length Mary raised the pretty, dishevelled head it was almost night. She began to undress without a light. She made no attempt to eat supper, though she had scarcely tasted food all day. Just at present she fed upon her griefs and found them substantial diet. She turned down the bedstead and got it ready for the night. She said a prayer absent-mindedly, and then lay down like a tired child.

But she was not quite comfortless. The old bedridden woman who needed her kept alive in her a touch of sweet human feeling. Mrs. Dowie scarcely realised, absorbed as she was to a great extent in her own aches and pains, that she represented to the little dressmaker all for which life was worth living. She was a very poor substitute for Jessie, but Jessie had loved her and honoured her. And then she was fond of Mary and grateful to her. They talked together of Jess, and Mrs. Dowie shed tears whenever she mentioned her name. Mary did not cry any longer. She seemed to have wept away all *her* tears.

One day the girl had a holiday. It was Boxing-day. Mrs. Dowie, in spite of her expectations to the contrary, had lived through the beginning of the cold weather, although Christmas-day had been sufficiently dreary and cheerless within and without to have killed her if she had been any longer keenly alive to the influences about her. She was little more than a skeleton now, and her bones showed through the dry yellow skin. She was wrapped up as warmly as possible. Over her shoulders, as she sat in bed, was a little jacket that had belonged to Jess; the sleeves were tied together in front. Her bed was very near the window, and the parish nurse who looked in every morning had put up a bit of an old clothes-horse and thrown a skirt on it to keep off the draught.

Mrs. Dowie was slowly drinking the cup of cocoa which the nurse had made before she left her. It did not look particularly tempting, being mixed only with water; but it was warm, and it comforted her. By her side, on the counterpane, was a worn brown volume, containing prayers and meditations for each day. It had large print, but Mrs. Dowie's sight was getting very dim, and she could scarcely manage to read even when the light was good. Still, she liked to have the book by her side.

When the door opened and Mary came in she looked up with a smile. The girl was a pretty sight even for her old eyes. The wind had brought a colour into her cheeks, and her hair was blown into an untidiness that became her. Though she still wore the black dress and the straw hat, she had supplemented the costume by a coat faced with red, which she had made with her own clever fingers, and the berries had been replaced by red ribbons. It was not vanity, but instinct, which prompted this young woman, little as she sought for admiration, always to make the best of herself.

Mrs. Dowie's voice had grown weaker than it had been, and she did not speak much above a whisper; but the gladness of her 'Why, *Mary!*' was quite audible to and pleased the girl.

'Yes, it's me,' she said, smiling.

The brightness of the morning had put her in better spirits than usual. It is difficult to be quite hopeless when one is barely five-and-twenty and the weather is exhilarating.

'I thought you was goin' for a walk, my dear.'

'So I am, presently. But I thought I would spend a little while with you first. Shall I read to you?'

Mary looked at the book on the bed.

'If you please, my dear. I ain't never too bad to listen to them blessed words.'

'Well, you drink your cocoa then, while I read.'

When the reading was over they talked for a little while, and then Mrs. Dowie said:

'Ain't you never goin' to git a young man, my dear?'

'No,' said Mary, gravely.

'Dear, dear. Young girls ain't what they was. I walked with two or three before I took up with Dowie. Why, there was one of 'em a tinker. He made me a tin to keep tea in as I've kep' by me for more'n half a century. It used to be full o' tea at one

time. It ain't got tea in it now though,' she added in a whisper, 'it ain't got tea in it now.'

Mrs. Dowie was not as a rule addicted to reminiscences. Mary thought it cheered her up to dwell on brighter times. She encouraged her to talk.

'Why didn't you have him, Mrs. Dowie?' she asked.

'I forget, my dear, there was so many of 'em; I don't rightly recollect the reasons. I remember that tin though. Havin' it have kep' me in mind of him. He was a nice young man; he had warts on his hands. He weren't as fine as Dowie. But I don't hold there's much difference in men. When they b'long to you you gets used to their looks. I was a-thinkin' o' that canister as I lay awake last night. I ain't seed it for a long time. It ain't got no tea in it now. But I fancy I'd like to look at it.'

'Where is it?' Mary asked.

Mrs. Dowie hesitated momentarily. Then she said:

'It's on the top shelf in the cupboard behind some other things. Maybe it's very dusty. I ain't set eyes on it this long time, not since the summer. Dear, dear, what a while I've been stuck to this 'ere bed!'

Mary rose and carried the chair to the cupboard to assist her in reaching the shelf. Mrs. Dowie, groaning a little as she turned in bed, watched her with some anxiety in her narrowed eyes. Mary removed the empty bottles and odds and ends that prevented her getting at the tin. Then she reached it down, and blew off the dust daintily. She had a wholesome horror of dirt in any shape.

'Bring it here,' said Mrs. Dowie in a voice that was shrill and somewhat peremptory. The sight of the old tin had, for some reason, excited her.

'You'd better let me find something to rub it over with first,' said Mary. 'You've got a clean sheet to your bed, and it'll dirty it.'

Mrs. Dowie trembled with suppressed eagerness. 'Don't worrit to open it,' said she. 'It ain't likely to ha' got dirty *inside*. There,' with a sigh of content as Mary placed it in her outstretched hands, 'that's it. Thank you, my dear. I'm afraid I've been troublin' you. But I had a fancy to see this 'ere tin. Now, don't you stay here any longer, but git off for your walk.'

Mary wondered a little as she went away at the old woman's 'fancy.' She attributed it to the unreasonable eccentricities of

age, and thought perhaps Mrs. Dowie had been fonder of the tinker than of the husband she had married, and so cherished the souvenir she had retained. It suddenly occurred to her to give Mrs. Dowie a little surprise. She remembered the tone in which the old creature had said, 'It ain't got tea in it now,' and she determined to buy half a pound and put it in the canister. Her purse was a slender one, but she had no one to consider but herself; so when she came to a general shop that was not closed she went in and made her purchase.

Except for the pleasure afforded to her by this unselfish action, the walk was not a very successful one. The streets were full of holiday people. All the girls who were fortunate enough to possess this essential to a gala costume had their long feathers in their hats—feathers which went round the crown and hung down behind. Their satisfaction in their appearance was patent on their faces. They knew they would be irresistible in the eyes of their lovers.

Then the crowded streets troubled and dismayed her. There is no loneliness comparable to the loneliness of being in a crowd with which one has nothing in common, while yet one has no ties independent of it. The sense of isolation is little less than crushing. Mary suddenly turned round. A great, unconquerable longing to get back to the one person who made her world, the one person who needed her and watched for her coming, took possession of her. The feeling she had for the ugly, ignorant old woman was almost passion. She longed to feel the clinging touch of those yellow wrinkled fingers, to see the smile in the dim bleared eyes, to hear the muttered thanks for some little office rendered. She felt that neither the sunshine nor the keen bracing wind was congenial to her any longer; the one mocked, the other chilled her. The atmosphere of the close dull bedchamber in the attic from which her healthy nature had often shrunk, seemed to her now more desirable than that of this bleak outer world. She hurried back in the direction from which she had come, finally she broke into a run.

Mrs. Dowie's door was ajar. She pushed it open softly and peeped in. The old woman, who had not expected her back yet awhile, was dozing, propped up as usual, and with her head dropped upon her breast. She could not breathe properly lying down. Mary stood for a minute watching her, almost tenderly. How pathetically helpless she looked, this poor soul, who had out-

lived all her interests, and whose child and grandchild had died before her!

On the bed, close to her elbow, was the tin, the puerile object of her affectionate interest. After all, she was in her second childhood, and all children must have their playthings. Mary, smiling as might an indulgent mother who prepares a surprise for a sick little one, drew the canister towards her, and lifted off the lid preparatory to pouring in the tea.

To her surprise, however, she saw that the tin was not empty. It was filled with rather dirty lumps of cotton-wool. She began to pull them out, still smiling. The layer of wool was not deep. She then came upon what appeared to be a small bundle of rag. As she lifted this out, pulling it with some slight difficulty through the narrow opening at the top of the tin, something fell with a little clink upon the chair. She stooped and looked at it, then gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise. It was a piece of gold; a sovereign!

She untied the knot of the bundle hurriedly. Scarcely was it undone when, to her astonishment, there fell to the ground piece after piece of money, and rolled to the various corners of the room, while she stood open-mouthed with wonder. There must have been six pounds at least—so much she reflected even in her bewilderment as she watched the rolling coins.

But she had little time for thought. The noise made Mrs. Dowie wake with a start. She looked about her for a minute vaguely, then, as her eyes fell on Mary, who still held the tin under her arm, a look almost of terror gleamed in them, and she shrieked, 'Give it me!—give it me!' at the same time holding out her skinny hands towards the treasure.

But Mary did not obey her. Acting under she scarcely knew what irresistible impulse, she withheld the object of Mrs. Dowie's desire; she disregarded the feverish eagerness of her look and tone, and deliberately turned and emptied the contents of the tin on to the table. She wondered afterwards that it had not struck her that an empty vessel would have been lighter than this was. There fell out several little bundles similar to the one she had opened. She undid them while Mrs. Dowie begged and implored and wept, and it was only when the feeble creature tried to get out of bed that she turned and laid the empty tin in her hands. But it was not the *tin* she wanted.

'Give me my money!' she wailed; 'give me my money!'

Mary gathered it up in her hands; then she flung the heaps of gold on to the tattered coverlid, and the coins rolled hither and thither, and some fell down upon the ground, while Mrs. Dowie clutched vainly at them, and others she scooped up with her long talon-like nails and tried to drop back, one by one, into the tin.

And Mary stood and watched, making no effort to help. Her slim young figure was erect; her white face wore a disdainful smile; her eyes were hard and glittering. All the pure love in her had died out—was quenched, as it seemed, irrevocably. She spoke no word. She only looked at Mrs. Dowie, and well might the poor creature cower beneath her gaze.

At last Mary spoke. Her voice was so clear and cold and cutting that Mrs. Dowie scarcely recognised it.

'And all this time,' she said—'all this time you have been deceiving me—deceiving us all. You haven't been what you pretended. You was rich when Jessie was spending her bits of savings on you—rich when the parish helped you—rich when you've been lyin' there almost in want!'

Mrs. Dowie did not answer. She was exhausted with the excitement and the struggle. She had only strength to fumble with the money, lifting it up and letting it slip through her nerveless fingers. It was a curious picture, had there been anyone to note it. As for Mary, she could only recoil from the sight of the being she had revered, weeping maudlin tears upon her useless hoarded gold.

'Yes,' said Mary again, 'you're rich. If there's one pound spread there there's fifty. You can get people to attend on you. There's plenty 'll do it, if you show you can pay them, as wouldn't when they thought there was nothing to be gained by it. You can easily find some one as 'll even read prayers to you. I can't do it never any more.'

Suddenly her voice changed. At the words she spoke herself a righteous wrath melted the icebound flood of indignation; it burst forth now in a torrent.

'Prayers,' she said, 'and readings about God, and pretendin' to be so pious! And all the while you was hoardin' money, and actin' hypocritically and deceivin' them as thought you destitute. When I think of it, it makes me burn with anger. It aint anything as you've taken from me. You're welcome to all you've had, for Jessie's sake; but it's not bein' what you seemed as I can't get over. You've done me a cruel wrong, Mrs. Dowie.

P'raps you can't rightly realise how I've set store by you and trusted in you, and fancied you was all you seemed; and now that's all done. I'd rather have thought bad of you all along than find it out like this.' Her eyes flamed. 'It's all been cant and hypocrisy—your religion, and what things you've said; you've never been my Mrs. Dowie. I don't see as I can come here any more.'

The old woman turned and looked up at her with the pitiful expression of a dumb animal which is receiving at the hands of a beloved master a well-merited chastisement. At her movement another of the coins rolled on to the ground and across the room; her eyes fell from Mary's face to follow its course. Then she pointed to the heap of gold which lay on the coverlid.

'Put it back,' she said feebly. 'It falls when I moves.'

'Yes,' said Mary, 'I will put it back.'

'There,' she said, when her work was completed. 'Do you want it put back on the shelf?'

'As you please, my dear,' said the old woman wearily. Her interest in her treasure seemed to have died out during the long pause when Mary had been doing it up.

Mary shivered a little at the term of endearment. That, like everything else, had lost its meaning. She had the intolerance of youth, and believed that where something was false nothing could be genuine. She no longer believed that Mrs. Dowie cared for her, but for the things which she gave her.

Mary put the tin on the shelf, and arranged the bottles as before. It seemed to her many days, instead of a few hours, since she had got it down. Then she crossed over to the bed.

'Good-bye,' she said, 'I'm goin'.'

'Oh, my dear,' said Mrs. Dowie, her mouth drooping, and fresh tears beginning to roll down her hollow cheeks, 'you ain't goin' for good?'

'Yes,' said Mary sternly. 'It wouldn't be any use me comin', Mrs. Dowie. We wouldn't be comfortable together. Nothing would seem nateral any more.'

'Oh,' wailed the poor thing, 'I'm so old, Mary—I'm so old! My bones is achin'; my breathin's bad. The Lord won't lay that upon me!'

'It isn't God, Mrs. Dowie. It's your own sin. I wonder you dare use that Name. You may say,' she went on, 'that it isn't for me to judge, but there's a harm you've done me can't never be

repaired. You've taken away everythink I cared for. If you'd died I'd always have thought of you in a sort of way like bein' with Jessie. I wouldn't have had any but kind notions of yer, and when people acted bad I should have thought, "Well, if some as I've loved has deceived me"—here her voice trembled—"there's been others as I could trust. There was old Mrs. Dowie, and there was Jessie." But you've taken that comfort away from me. You'll make it the other way. When anyone seems good or right I shall think, "Ah! but so did Mrs. Dowie, yet she was deceivin' me all the while." Why, I'm wonderin' now if, after all, *Jessie*, who seemed an angel well nigh, wasn't p'raps untrue and shamming. I can't expect you quite to re'lise what you've done to me, Mrs. Dowie. You'd have to be me to understand. If I've spoke hard, you must forgive me. I'm goin' now. . . . Oh!' as her eye fell on the tea, 'I'll leave you that. I bought it when I thought you *needed* it. But I ain't goin' to take it away.'

She might have spared her victim this last little piece of sarcasm. Mrs. Dowie did not, as Mary had hinted, understand exactly why the latter was so unforgiving towards her, but she gathered that she had injured the girl, so that the latter was never coming any more, and that yet she had brought her a present and was not going to deprive her of it. She began to cry and sob like a child. Her evident grief must have melted any but a heart steeled against her by resentment. 'Oh!' she kept saying inarticulately, 'I'm so old—I'm so old, my dear—I'm so old!' But before long she was speaking to the silence. Mary had gone.

The girl walked home like one dazed. When she reached her room she took off her outer things mechanically, and then she sat down in Jessie's chair and thought steadily.

It was only the gathering dusk, and the cold which gradually crept over her, for she had omitted to set light to her fire, that recalled her to the present. Then she rose and fetched matches. As the light leapt up in the quickly kindled fire it showed a face prematurely old. All the softness of youth had died out of it. It was tired and stern and repellent. Those who have God for a refuge can hardly bear to realise there is no human creature in whom they can put their trust. Is it any wonder that those who have not this strong tower whereto to flee steel their hearts as a protection from their kind?

'I'll never go near her again,' Mary said; 'I shouldn't know

what to say nor how to act if I did. I couldn't be like I used to be. I can't sham. It'll be kinder to stay away. It'll hurt her less. 'Not as I can seem to care much,' she went on. 'No, I shan't be unhappy any more. People are all frauds and selfish. They ain't worth loving. In future I'm only going to think about myself. I'm hungry. I'll have my tea.'

When she got up her eye fell on the likeness of Jessie on the mantelpiece. She turned it face downwards.

When Mary went to her work on Monday even the other girls noticed a change in her. During the last months the change had been going on, it is true, but it had been gradual, and there had been something of pathos to soften her expression and keep her like the Mary who, if she had been too reserved to be a favourite amongst them, had yet been liked and in a way looked up to. Besides, a little glamour had fallen on her because she was Jessie's special friend, and everyone loved Jessie. But now the alteration in her was startling. She was like one who had sustained a shock which had petrified her.

All that dreary week she went to and fro to her work, speaking none but the necessary words, and exchanging no smile or kindly greeting with any fellow-creature. She came in in the evening and cooked her supper and ate it in solitude. Afterwards she read or did her own sewing. She did not think. She had nothing to think of. She even gave up saying her prayers, a habit she had contracted to please Jessie. If ever her mind reverted to Jessie, she would not let it dwell on the image of the dear girl-friend, lest that should soften her.

But she was not suffered to be thus blighted when she was scarcely out of her girlhood. Whether, in the course of nature, a reaction would have set in before very long it is impossible to say, but the reaction came. He who had been the cause of her first trouble was the instrument who saved her in her second. He had shattered her faith and crushed her hopes, it was for him to restore them.

It was New Year's day. Mary awoke to the knowledge that a fresh year was opening without interest. The last year had been filled with joy and with sorrow. It was dead and buried. The future held for her neither the one nor the other. It stretched before her a dreary blank which had to be lived through somehow. She hoped for nothing and feared nothing.

As she did her hair before the little square glass on the wall,

she noticed with scarcely a pang that her beauty was on the wane, that she looked pinched and wan, that her eyes had dark hollows beneath them, and that her very hair seemed to have lost its lustre. Last year there was cause to rejoice in her beauty. Now, what did it matter if she lost it? It did but follow all other gifts of which she had been bereft.

The postman's knock, though it was not heard with great frequency in that neighbourhood, did not give rise to any speculations. If she had reflected, she would only have imagined that, being New Year's day, someone in the house had received a card or a letter from an absent friend. Personally she expected nothing, and was consequently not interested. She started, therefore, with something almost like dismay when there was a rap at her door, and the voice of a woman who lived in the house said: 'There's one for you, Miss Curtis.'

She took the envelope and glanced at it as calmly as if the receipt of letters were a daily occurrence. Yet she had not had one since the fatal missive had come from her sweetheart. But when her eye fell upon the superscription she flushed a sudden red and involuntarily her fingers closed over the envelope. The handwriting was familiar to her. Why had he broken the silence he had himself imposed? Why had he written to her?

She stood quite still for a while; had not her natural girlish impulsiveness been checked, she would have torn open the envelope and devoured the contents; but in her present mental condition she was able to deliberate. She had put away her lover from her life, from her thoughts. Was it wise to reopen a wound which had, she believed, ceased to ache? Should she drop the letter into the fire unread?

She was almost capable of such an action. But, fortunately, the feminine instinct of curiosity survived in her, and came to her aid. It may have been too that her will inclined in that direction. At any rate, she slowly and irresolutely opened the letter:—

MY DEAR MARY,—You'll maybe wonder that I dare to write to you since the last. But it's New Year beginning to-morrow and I can't help it. I've been looking through the past one, and I can't but see I've made a great mistake which I must ask your forgiveness. If you'll let me come and see you, Mary, again, I'll explain proper. It takes so many words to make a letter clear. But I've seen Mr. Watson lately, a gentleman that used to come to the East and

whose father lives here, that he came home for Christmas, and I met him, and he stopped and asked after you, and when I told him what I'd done he said I was a fool and worse, and was to ask you to make it right. He was very kind. He told me he'd most wrecked his life and some lady that he loved by not trustin' in her love; and he said that when I thought I'd been actin' self-denyin' and unselfish I'd been really very selfish, because I didn't know women, and how they would rather suffer with him they love than be left to themselves. You see, darling, I fancied I was making a martyr of *myself*, and didn't see both sides, and that women like you puts love before comfort. It was this way. I didn't ever tell you, because I prided myself on being respectable, and I knew you thought me different from many of the chaps round that way. Anything good in me I owe to my mother, Mary. She's been an angel to me, and so she was to all she loved. My father was very bad; he ill-treated her, and drank and worse, and knew the inside of prison. He was there when my mother died. She loved him and thought about him, and she made me promise I wouldn't never cast him off if he come my way. However, I scarcely saw him except on and off, and he didn't enter into my calculation. He drank all he earned. Not long before I wrote to you I come across him. He was a dreadful drunkard, and down on his luck so as to be near starvin'. He begged of me, and I did my best. But he drank all. I see I couldn't help him but one way, that was having him to live with me and lookin' after him. But then I couldn't because of you that I owed a duty to. I was dreadful worried. He'd taken a fancy to me, and it seemed I could manage him a bit. If I cast him off there weren't anything but ruin before him. And I kept thinking of my mother, and it seemed she urged me on. And then I said: "You must give up Mary; it ain't fair to ask her to live with a drunken father. Why should she wait all the years till he dies?" There was so much to think of, and I couldn't see my way to doin' my duty to both. P'raps I was headstrong. But I couldn't bear to see you. I couldn't ha' trusted myself. And I was a bit sorry after I'd written, doubting if I'd done right. But I'd chucked my work and all. I said I must go away. I didn't feel I could bear to see you take up with anyone else for one thing. I've regretted since that I didn't tell you all; it was pride. Mr. Watson he thinks I've been wrong. If you're still free Mary, it'd comfort

me if you'd write. P'raps you'll let things go on. My father can't live long. His habit is worse than I thought. And he's ill. I have much to bear, but I fancy I've acted right by him. This is a long letter, and I don't seem to have put it right, but I love you the same as ever, and I leave it to you to decide. If you won't forgive me having caused you pain (supposing you love me) for my sake, p'raps the thought of Jessie, what you said she always was, so full of gentleness, 'll make you do it. Let me hear soon at above address. And believe me always your sincerely and lovingly, from

‘JOHN STANTER.’

‘P.S.—The thought of you has been a blessing to me these months. I love you more than ever.’

‘The thought of Jessie.’ Those words suddenly struck Mary with a new force. Hitherto she had overlooked them in the overshadowing importance of other parts of the letter; those bearing more directly on herself and her lover. She forgave him—of course she forgave him. She honoured him for what he had done, even though she thought he had not acted fairly in withholding his confidence from her. She forgot that he had made her suffer, because now he filled her with such wonderful happiness; in one way she rejoiced that he had sacrificed her as well as himself. It was love which had prompted his action. And she could trust him, look up to him, worship him as before. The man dying of thirst does not need that one should force him to drink when water is held out to him. Mary did not need any outward power to urge her to call back her lover and restore him to the place he had held in her heart. She wondered how she could have lived so long without him through that dreary nightmare time.

But ‘the thought of Jessie.’ She laid aside the letter, and moving towards the mantelpiece lifted, almost reverently, the portrait of her friend, the portrait which in her passionate resentment against all the world she had turned face downwards. As she looked at it now, remembering how unselfishly Jess would have rejoiced at her happiness, a pang shot through her. It almost seemed as if the portrait regarded her reproachfully.

She laid it pensively down. A sense of her own unworthiness clouded her joy. She compared herself with her lover. He had made a sacrifice for a parent who yet may have been said to have no claims on him, and even that parent's degrading sin had not

stood between him and his duty. But she! How had she acted? After voluntarily undertaking certain duties to the poor helpless creature who was childless, she had flung them all up because she was disappointed in her *protégée*.

'I can't even write to him,' she said aloud, 'till I have made it up with Mrs. Dowie. It 'd seem as if I was hypocritical, not what he thought me. I must have acted wrong, because I couldn't bear for him to hear of it.' She looked at the photograph. 'Yes, Jess,' she whispered, 'I'm goin'.'

She actually formed the bold resolve of staying away from her work. She had never done such a thing before, and she thought she might for once presume upon her usual punctuality. She knew that she was a better workwoman than most in the shop, and would not be turned off for the first misdemeanour. Accordingly, she put the letter in her pocket, and, getting ready with her customary speed, hurried off to Mrs. Dowie's. One or two people going to their work turned as she passed them. The signs of suffering are never totally eradicated from the human countenance even by subsequent joy; but happiness had done wonders for Mary. She was irradiated by sunshine. The woman, who opened the door started on seeing her.

'Why,' she said, 'I wondered what had become of yer!'

'How's Mrs. Dowie?' Mary asked without vouchsafing an explanation.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't have time to see her, what with the children and all; but Mrs. Bean, she met the nurse comin' downstairs, and she told me she was goin'. I wonder she've held out so long. Old people is wonderful.'

'Is she—dying?' said Mary slowly.

'That's about it. And the best thing too. What's her life to her, I should like to know? And cough she do at nights, that Mrs. Bean can't sleep a wink. It sounds through them boards. I wish she'd go to the 'Firmary. I don't like it happenin' here. But, nurse, she put it to her. "No," she said; "I can't last long. Let me die in my bed." Still, I think she'll have to go, and that's the size of it.'

Mary passed by her and hurried up the narrow stairs. She was very much subdued by the woman's account.

She entered so quietly that Mrs. Dowie did not hear her. She was upright in bed. Her breathing admitted of no other attitude, her head being dropped forward. Her eyes were closed. Her

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She laid it pensively down. A sense of her own unworthiness clouded her joy. She compared herself with her lover. He had made a sacrifice for a parent who yet may have been said to have no claims on him, and even that parent's degrading sin had not

stood between him and his duty. But she! How had she acted? After voluntarily undertaking certain duties to the poor helpless creature who was childless, she had flung them all up because she was disappointed in her *protégée*.

'I can't even write to him,' she said aloud, 'till I have made it up with Mrs. Dowie. It 'd seem as if I was hypocritical, not what he thought me. I must have acted wrong, because I couldn't bear for him to hear of it.' She looked at the photograph. 'Yes, Jess,' she whispered, 'I'm goin'.'

She actually formed the bold resolve of staying away from her work. She had never done such a thing before, and she thought she might for once presume upon her usual punctuality. She knew that she was a better workwoman than most in the shop, and would not be turned off for the first misdemeanour. Accordingly, she put the letter in her pocket, and, getting ready with her customary speed, hurried off to Mrs. Dowie's. One or two people going to their work turned as she passed them. The signs of suffering are never totally eradicated from the human countenance even by subsequent joy; but happiness had done wonders for Mary. She was irradiated by sunshine. The woman who opened the door started on seeing her.

'Why,' she said, 'I wondered what had become of yer!'

'How's Mrs. Dowie?' Mary asked without vouchsafing an explanation.

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't have time to see her, what with the children and all; but Mrs. Bean, she met the nurse comin' downstairs, and she told me she was goin'. I wonder she've held out so long. Old people is wonderful.'

'Is she—dying?' said Mary slowly.

'That's about it. And the best thing too. What's her life to her, I should like to know? And cough she do at nights, that Mrs. Bean can't sleep a wink. It sounds through them boards. I wish she'd go to the 'Firmiry. I don't like it happenin' here. But, nurse, she put it to her. "No," she said; "I can't last long. Let me die in my bed." Still, I think she'll have to go, and that's the size of it.'

Mary passed by her and hurried up the narrow stairs. She was very much subdued by the woman's account.

She entered so quietly that Mrs. Dowie did not hear her. She was upright in bed. Her breathing admitted of no other attitude, her head being dropped forward. Her eyes were closed. Her

cheeks were hollow. She looked awful. Mary came up to her and touched the skeleton hand. Then Mrs. Dowie slowly opened the weary eyes and raised her head feebly. She thought it was the nurse come to attend to her.

'Not a bit of sleep all night,' she said in a dreary, complaining whisper. 'I'm worse.'

'Oh, I *am* sorry,' Mary said, stroking the hand still.

Perhaps the unwonted sympathy with which her daily announcement was received affected the waning intelligence. At any rate, Mrs. Dowie's eyes, which had been closed again, reopened and sought the girl's face, and a momentary light illumined them.

'It's—Mary,' she said wonderingly.

'Yes, dear,' Mary answered. She could scarcely restrain her tears. 'I've come—to read to you. Have you had your prayers this morning?'

The old woman shook her head. 'I—I can't rightly—remember,' she answered almost inaudibly. 'I—can't breathe. I may have said—the Lord's—prayer—I don't—know.' The old trembling hand went up to her head.

'Shall I say it, Mrs. Dowie?' Mary asked.

'If—you please, my dear.'

Mary began to say the only prayer she knew in her clear young voice, just now vibrating with sympathy and earnestness. Mrs. Dowie's lips moved (almost, as it seemed, mechanically) in unison. When Mary came to 'Forgive us our trespasses,' she broke down and stopped, making an effort to calm herself. She was overcome by mingled emotions. Mrs. Dowie waited, still with clasped hands and closed eyes. When Mary did not go on she regarded her wonderingly. The girl's face was hidden in her hands.

'As we forgive them—that—trespass against—us,' Mrs. Dowie prompted her.

Mary heard the tired, patient whisper. She looked up with streaming eyes at the old woman. 'O, Mrs. Dowie,' she sobbed, 'I wish I hadn't—kep' away.'

Mrs. Dowie looked at her almost inquiringly. She was so exhausted, so near the end of her struggle, that she no longer appeared capable of strong emotion. Her grief at Mary's absence had spent itself in the last two days. She scarcely seemed to realise why the girl was reproaching herself.

'You've—kep' away?' she said. 'Yes—I remember. Is it long? It's all——' She paused, her voice dying away. Then she

made an effort to speak louder: 'I'm very weak, my dear. You was angry at the money. I—I—ain't spent it—— Oh, my poor bones—no—I ain't—spent it.'

Then she made a fresh start.

'They said—the work'us. But let me die in my bed—— It can't be long now—it can't be long.'

Then she began to cry. But the feeble wail was stopped by a cough.

It was indescribably painful to see the poor worn form racked in this way, to hear the efforts at breathing.

'Oh,' she said; 'oh, oh!'

The sounds were like groans. She was bent nearly double.

'Mrs. Dowie,' Mary said presently, when there was silence again, 'you needn't fear as they'll take you away. I will stay with you, and look after you, and you shall have all you want.'

'You're very—good, my dear.'

Her lips framed the words. She was incapable of further speech just then.

Mary sat by her for a long while. Mrs. Dowie made no movement all the time. Once Mary wondered if she were dead. She would have given anything to undo the work of the last week. The remembrance of it would have seemed easier to bear if Mrs. Dowie had reproached her with unkindness or seemed to realise that she had anything to forgive. Her meek acceptance of Mary's absence seemed to the latter to make it more unjustifiable. Suddenly Mrs. Dowie spoke again. It seemed as if strength and memory had momentarily returned.

'It weren't all sham, my dear,' she said. 'I—I did love—the Lord. Jessie 'd tell—you. I'd saved it. I—didn't rightly—see—it was sinnin'!'

'Don't talk about it, Mrs. Dowie.'

'I'm so old—and so tired. Don't—keep away.'

'I will never leave you.'

'Thank you, my dear—— The tin.'

'Do you want it, Mrs. Dowie?'

She nodded her head.

'Yes—I want it.'

Mary got it down and handed it to her. But she shook her head.

'No. I ain't—touched it. I've—kep' it for you.'

She turned her pleading, affectionate eyes to Mary. Then closed them again, for ever.

CYCLOPS IN LONDON.

'TIDAL BASIN,' shouted the porters, as our train pulled up with a jerk at the dirty little railway station bearing this name.

Accompanied by a friend, I had come to take advantage of the courteous permission given me by the Manager of the Thames Iron Works and Shipbuilding Company to visit the works of that distinguished firm.

'Way to the Works, sir?' said the ticket collector, in response to our inquiries; for the inhabitants of this neighbourhood wisely refrain from using the full denomination with which the Company is dignified. 'First on your left after crossing the bridge.'

It was a cold, raw day, and as we left the station we found that it had begun to rain. In fact, whenever I visit this region, it is raining—raining quietly, but steadily, with quite a business-like persistence. In the absence of authoritative statistics to confirm my theory, I should scarcely like to affirm positively that a fine day at Blackwall has never been known; but, from the copious supply of liquid black mud with which the streets in that part of the Metropolis seem invariably to be furnished, I feel strongly inclined to believe that the drizzling rain I have always experienced there is a permanent feature in the weather of the locality. Should any person be venturous enough to suggest that, if this is the case, Blackwall must be a well-washed place, he would be merely proving that he had never been there. The idea of the rain that falls in London E. possessing cleansing power, in however small a degree, would be enough to excite to merriment the gravest of those who know the district.

After following for a few minutes the route indicated by our friend the ticket collector, we found that his directions savoured more of brevity than of exactness; for, though 'the first on the left' undoubtedly led to one portion of the premises of the Thames Iron Works, we soon discovered that we had only reached one end of a collection of sheds and yards, which extended altogether over a stretch of land measuring nearly forty acres; and that to find the offices of the Company was no easy matter. However, after repeated inquiries and much fruitless exploration on our own account, we reached our destination; and, after a few minutes'

conversation with a gentleman whose name I have forgotten, but to whose courtesy I take this opportunity of testifying, we started under the care of a guide to see as much as was possible in the limited time at our disposal.

After a glance at two graving docks, one of which contained a smart-looking paddle-boat belonging to the Telegraph service, we entered the principal workshop of the engineering department. Here all was activity, accompanied unfortunately by a ceaseless din, which to our unaccustomed ears was far from pleasant; but before long we were so absorbed in the many interesting sights shown us as to be almost unconscious of the pandemonium of noise that was going on around us. We found ourselves in a large brick building containing rows of busy machines connected by numberless leather belts to driving wheels overhead, which in their turn all derived their power from a pair of powerful engines situated in an adjacent shed. At first sight, however, it seemed more like a chaos of moving iron and whirling belts than an ordered collection of machines. Not a yard of space was wasted, and to thread one's way round the building was no very easy task. Everything was in motion, and one never felt quite safe amidst the mass of noisy, whirling machinery. It seemed as though, in this shed alone, every possible kind of machine tool was represented, but our subsequent experiences proved that the wonders had only begun.

There were drills innumerable, boring holes of all sizes through iron and steel articles of various descriptions, from boiler-plates to screw-propellers. Of the latter we were shown numerous specimens, including a large four-bladed one of novel design. A kind of first cousin to the drill, the slotting machine, was also well represented. Its construction and mode of working are quite different to the drill, but, as it is principally used for cutting square holes through metal, there is a relationship to the borer of round ones.

Lathes of all sorts and sizes were also plentiful, and one of them, a machine of truly noble proportions, was particularly interesting. In this case a large mass of steel, twelve or fifteen feet in length, was being rapidly revolved, while a workman applied a chisel which peeled off the irregularities of its form with an ease wonderful to see.

'That is part of the shaft we are making for the P. & O. steamer *Pekin*,' explained our guide.

The process by which the pieces of a shaft are fastened together

is very interesting. Two parts having been fitted together, a gun-metal collar, bored out of one piece to a size a little smaller than the shaft itself, is heated until it has expanded enough to allow the shaft to be passed through it. The collar is then left to cool round the join, which it holds together, when it has shrunk to its original size, with a grip that could be obtained in no other way.

Near here we saw a powerful-looking machine planing the edges of six steel plates simultaneously, while the floor around it was covered with the bright metal shavings that were flying off the keen blade. Another machine was punching round holes through an iron plate half an inch in thickness. It was fitted with an instrument something like a cheese-taster, which cut a hole clean through the iron every time it descended.

After spending some time looking at the 'light turnery,' we moved towards the pumping-room, and on our way passed the six huge boilers that supply the steam for all the machinery situated in this part of the works. It was here that my friend, who until then had succeeded in hiding his wonderment by a feigned demeanour of dignified silence, betrayed his ignorance of things engineering by innocently asking if the coal that the firemen were shovelling into the blazing furnaces was 'Best Welsh.' The astonished expression on the grimy face of the man addressed was a study, as he replied with a grin, that they only burnt 'Common Yorkshire.'

Arrived at the pumping-room, the principal features of the machinery were pointed out to us by the engineer in charge, who, at our request, put the engines in motion. The pump is used for emptying the dry docks, and is capable of reducing the level of water in the basin (about 400 feet in length) at the rate of eighteen inches an hour, which is equivalent to nearly 200 tons, or 400,000 gallons, per hour. The bucket or drum of the pump lifts $4\frac{1}{2}$ tons weight of water each time it is raised, yet so well made are the india-rubber valves with which it is fitted, that only three, out of the total of eight, have been replaced since October 1891. The engineer took a great pride in his engine, as was amply testified by the spotless condition of every part of the machinery, except the well itself, which was filled with a column of typical Thames water, if the black muddy liquid we were shown deserves to bear the same name as the poet's 'crystal of the spring.'

Our attention was next directed to the hydraulic riveter, an

invention which has to a great extent replaced the old method of hand-riveting in all the large workshops. The greater part of the Forth Bridge was bound together in this manner, and at the Tower Bridge, now being built over the Thames, a large number of these machines are at work. On comparing the two methods, the 'hand' and the 'machine,' as they are called, one certainly cannot wonder at the preference shown by engineers for the latter. In the first place, riveting by hand is by far the slower process, each rivet requiring a great deal of hammering to insure its being firm in its place. And, secondly, if the workmen are not skilful, the rivet becomes cold before the operation is completed, the result being an unsound or loose rivet, which has to be drilled out in order that a new one may be inserted. On the other hand, the speed and exactness with which the hydraulic riveter does its work insure a sound rivet, and avoid the disadvantages of the manual system.

The design and working of the machine are very simple. A boy having placed a red-hot rivet in one of the holes, previously drilled or punched through the metal undergoing the process, a block of iron presses against the head of the rivet, holding it in its place, while a small ram on the other side, driven by hydraulic power, forces down the projecting end, squeezing it silently and almost instantaneously into a neat round nob corresponding to the head on the reverse side. It is very fascinating to watch the rivets being thus noiselessly pressed into shape, one after another, until, so quickly is the work performed, there is a row of round metal heads, still glowing with heat. But, perfect as is the work done by this machine, its application is necessarily limited to such work as can be placed between the rams, all other jobs being done by hand. Thus, the men who have made the old-fashioned mode of riveting their trade are in no danger of being deprived of employment, though, doubtless, many of them have been forced to turn their attention to other branches of the iron industries.

After passing some new machinery for bending iron and steel plates, which was being erected on foundations of concrete sixteen feet in thickness, we came to the principal shipbuilding slips of the Company. These are so arranged that the vessels built on them are launched into the centre channel of Bow Creek, alias the estuary of the River Lea (which runs through the premises), and get a clear run into and across the broad Bugshy's Reach, as the Thames at this point is called, the total

distance from the slips to opposite bank being just upon half a mile. To those who are not well versed in such matters, I venture to point out that this fact is a very important one; for from those building slips that do not afford a good run for vessels taking the water, the operation of launching is both difficult and dangerous. At such yards it frequently happens that the precautions taken for checking the ship's 'way' prove inadequate or faulty, and the result is that she dashes on to the opposite bank of the river.

At first sight, I must confess, the slips did not strike us as imposing, being in appearance no more than two rows of shabby-looking scaffolding, with some muddy planking running down the centre and disappearing into the black waters of the Lea; but, when we learned their history, a sort of veneration grew up in our minds for the apparently humble stocks before us.

The last occupants of these yards were the *Grafton* and the *Theseus*, two of the eight first-class protected cruisers ordered by the late Government under the Naval Defence Act, the most famous of the class being perhaps the *Royal Arthur*, launched by the Queen last year at Portsmouth. These vessels (which we afterwards visited at the Victoria Docks, where they are being fitted up) are sister ships of 7,350 tons, having a length of 360 feet. Their engines are designed to develop 12,000 horse-power, which is expected to give them a speed of nearly twenty knots an hour. But magnificent as are these specimens of modern naval architecture, the shipbuilding record of the firm contains many larger vessels.

Close to the dry docks are the 'sheer legs,' capable of lifting eighty tons. The 'sheer legs' (simply an immense tripod derrick) are used for the lifting of boilers, and other very heavy weights, into vessels alongside them. These particular ones seemed of huge height; and a fine view could no doubt be obtained from their top; but we had no great wish to see for ourselves, as there was apparently no way up except by some iron rungs rivetted to the after or hind leg, climbing being, therefore, a difficult and rather dangerous operation.

In 1860 the *Warrior*, the first sea-going iron-built armour-plated ship in the Royal Navy, was launched from the Thames Iron Works. Three years later the gigantic *Minotaur* took the water; but this vessel, which is the longest ironclad under the British flag, proved a turning point in naval construction. Many other vessels followed, including the *Superb*, a central battery ship of 9,000

tons, until, coming to more modern times, the *Benbow* glided down the ways in 1885. This vessel is one of the six battle ships forming the 'Admiral' class, and is a sister to H.M.S. *Howe*, which went ashore at Ferrol a short time ago. It is sufficient to say that this monster, considered by many to be, until the completion of the *Royal Sovereign*, the most formidable warship afloat, has a displacement of 10,600 tons and a speed of sixteen knots. She is protected by a steel armour belt of 18 inches thickness, = 24 inches of iron, and carries two 111-ton guns, in addition to an auxiliary battery of twenty-five smaller guns; the single discharge of this vessel's broadsides being nearly four thousand pounds in weight. In 1887 came the *Sanspareil*, sister to the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron, the *Victoria*; but, though of a different design, in size and power she is similar to the *Benbow*. Altogether the Company has built eight hundred vessels; of a total displacement of 380,000 tons. Among these are several of most novel design, such as the *Pervenetz*, the first Russian ironclad; the *Vasco Da Gama*, the only Portuguese battleship, and the *Cleopatra*, built expressly for the transport of the famous Cleopatra's Needle to the Embankment, where it now stands.

The last vessel of exceptional importance built by the firm was the cruiser *Blenheim*, launched two years ago, and designed to run at the hitherto unrivalled speed of twenty-two knots, or about twenty-five English miles per hour. I remember inspecting this vessel when just completed, and no other warship I have ever seen brought home to me more forcibly the rapid strides made by naval architecture during the last few years. Her long and extraordinarily sharp bows, her great beam, and the gigantic funnels required by her 20,000 horse-powered engines, all combine to give her a look of speed and strength which no man 'with half an eye for a ship' could fail to be impressed with.

Leaving the building slips, we resumed our round of inspection. Entering a shed on our right, we were shown some new machinery for preparing armour plates and bringing their strength and power of resistance up to the required standard, by passing them under rollers at a high pressure—a process which, up to the present, has not been performed on the premises.

And now the dull thuds, which for some time had been audible in the distance, grew louder, and we could feel the ground vibrating as we approached the place whence the sound came. It was the steam hammers at work, and, suddenly, as we rounded a

corner, a blaze of red light told us that we had reached the forges. The work going on just then was the process of preparing old iron for further use, after it had been 'puddled.' The pieces of waste metal, having been previously collected and broken up, are melted down in the furnaces and placed under the hammer to be beaten into masses of suitable size and close texture. The latter operation we stayed to witness, and a most impressive sight it was.

The door of a furnace was opened, and, out of its blazing interior, a workman, by means of a pair of gigantic pincers hung on a crane, drew a lump of iron, weighing several hundredweight, and raised to such an intense heat that, as it was swung round to where the hammer was placed, drops of liquid metal ran from its glowing mass, and blue flames flickered round its sides. The whole dark shed was lit up with the ruddy glare of the metal, and the heat was so great that we soon drew back to a respectful distance. Then as the huge steam hammer, 120 tons in weight, rained down blows that shook the ground beneath our feet, there flew off from the soft iron showers of brilliant sparks, in size and number so far exceeding those to be seen in an ordinary blacksmith's shop, as to dwarf to nothingness all recollections of the beauties of the latter scene. With a wonderful adroitness the workmen quickly turned the huge mass of hot metal so that in a couple of minutes, or even less, it had been knocked into the shape required and carried out to cool, a process of several hours' duration.

Some idea of the terrific power of these hammers may be gained by my mentioning that the anvils used (blocks of iron weighing some tons) soon get so flattened and beaten out of shape as to be useless.

But perhaps the most wonderful of all the various processes that metal undergoes is the casting in moulds. It so happened that about a dozen castings were about to be made that afternoon with a new kind of steel (patented, I believe, by a Mr. Radcliffe), which has so successfully withstood the severe test applied to it that the Government have issued orders for a large number of castings to be made of this material.

We were first shown the furnaces in which the ore was being heated, and a door was opened for us to look at the molten metal inside. But though our eyes were protected by large blue spectacles, the glasses of which approached opacity more nearly than transparency, the light was so dazzling that we were not much edified by what we saw, or rather tried to see.

The metal being now declared in a fit state for casting, the preparations for carrying out this operation were rapidly completed. The moulds had already been placed in a row between a pair of rails, on which ran a truck carrying the 'ladle,' a round iron vessel about four feet in diameter. This vessel having been previously heated by fires placed in and below it, was lifted off its carriage by a crane, and hung under the spout which served as a mouth to the furnace. Then, with their hands protected by large gloves, the men began to scrape away the sand which had been used to keep in the metal. After several shovelfuls had been thus removed, with a hissing and spluttering, some red-hot clinkers fell out, followed by dribblets of liquid ore, which, quickly increasing into a continuous stream, ran splashing like water into the receptacle just described. It would have been hard to realise that this quickly rushing stream of liquid matter was really steel, had it not been for the intense glare and fierce heat that it emitted, which bore witness, through the undeniable evidence of our scorched skin, to the tremendous heat to which it had been raised.

And now, the huge ladle being full, the crane swung round and, placing it on its carriage, pushed it along the rails to where moulds had been placed, leaving the mouth of the furnace still pouring out a stream of splashing metal. When the row of moulds was reached a tap at the bottom of the vessel was opened, and a jet of the liquid metal shot out. The first mould having been quickly filled to overflowing, the truck was moved on to the next one, the process being repeated until all the castings had been taken.

The moulds are made of sand, with hair or straw to make the material bind, and, where necessary, wire to keep it firm. They are modelled from wooden patterns, by means of small trowels and other tools of a similar sort, and, as can be readily understood, the trade of mould-making requires great delicacy and exactness. When complete, metal bands are bolted round the moulds, which are then placed in ovens until baked hard.

By the time the casting was finished we had so little time left that, after a hurried visit to the respective departments of girder building, electric light, and mould making, we found it necessary to take our departure, after having spent nearly three hours in the realms of Cyclops.

STRANGERS, AND TAKEN IN.

THE 'Open Air Hotel' had a fine antique flavour about it. We liked the name, so Bopper and I lounged wearily in at the dilapidated coach entrance.

'Do the gentlemen wish to sleep here?' asked a female antique, who evidently went with the building. 'Yes, the gentlemen *had* thought of such a thing.'

She regretted that the hotel no longer put up travellers. One could drink there, but not sleep. 'Doubtless the gentlemen can read?'

Her tone was not so hopeful as her words, so Bopper hastened to assure her that we were not so bad as all that. He was a little touchy on the point. He knew that our appearance did not improve as we went on. But this was only our fifth night on the tramp, and it was really too soon to begin remarks of this kind.

'Then, if the gentlemen will have the goodness to leave by this door, and take the first turning to the left, they will see before them a very suitable hotel, and not too dear.'

The 'Open Air Hotel' was evidently one of those delightfully confusing places that you enter by one street and leave by another—doubtless a most convenient arrangement in the good old days when the hotel was in its prime.

The first turning to the left brought us to the 'Three Travellers,' a good third-rate hotel. We knew from the size of Gien that there was bound to be an 'Hôtel de France' somewhere, but, too tired to move a step further, we dropped our knapsack—it was Bopper's turn to carry it that day—and clamoured for food.

Sipping his preliminary absinthe, Bopper reviled the Open Air antique for her low esteem in selecting such a humble house for us distinguished foreigners.

Dinner—our tramp supplied the sauce—put new life into us. We strolled out to see the town.

Sure enough, there was the usual comfortable 'Hôtel de France.' Passing by it without comment—our hearts too full for words—we came to the *Mairie*, in front of which was a warlike statue.

Being new to that part of the country, we had actually to ask the name of the figure. We were just on the border of the Ver-

cingetorix country. For weeks after we never had to ask the name of a statue. Whenever we saw a figure with a weapon in its hand of any kind from a horsewhip to a patent combination of mace and battle-axe we knew it was Vercingetorix. In that district they parse Vercingetorix as a common noun.

At any rate Bopper told a schoolmaster so with a point of interrogation, and the schoolmaster did not deny it.

After admiring our first Vercingetorix we wandered on to the bridge. The setting sun was turning the Loire into blood. Even Bopper, the Philistine, said it was fine.

We sat down in one of the embrasures of the bridge to admire the town.

Up on the hill behind the houses was a very fine old château—a sort of compound of the Norman castle and the old Scotch Baronial.

Stopping a passer-by I asked whose the castle was. The man seemed astonished at our ignorance.

‘But, to Mr. the Commandant,’ was the reply.

Bopper never liked to be outdone in hunting for information. He stopped a gendarme, and asked if we could get in to see the château.

‘But yes, perfectly, if the Commandant orders.’ From his grim smile we inferred that the order was not likely to be given. But gendarmes’ jokes are hard to comprehend.

When we got to our hotel we tried to find out more about the château, only to be met by gruff and evasive answers.

The crowning insult came. Never before in France, and never since, have we been asked to pay our bill in advance. Bopper stormed; my milder counsels prevailed. We paid. *Then* we saw our bedroom. It contained fifty square feet, and two beds. There was a 14-inch lane between the two beds. I thought of the last scene in the ‘Sentimental Journey’: Bopper thought of going to the ‘Hôtel de France.’ Bopper was right.

Once we passed a worse night. But our night with the ‘Three Travellers’ was bad enough to encourage early rising. We shook the dust of Gien from our feet at 3.50 A.M. Oh, the delight of that fresh morning walk along the Loire to Briare! The ten kilometres spun past without our noticing them. Our morning coffee! But I have promised Bopper to use no exclamation points in anything that he is concerned in, and he had coffee.

After a delightful morning’s walk of nearly fourteen miles we came to the dainty little village of Bonny, at about ten o’clock.

If you happen to be passing that way, don't forget to have breakfast at the 'Green Oak.' If you hurry you may even have the good fortune to be served by the same dainty maiden that Bopper himself had to praise. He exercises very freely his married man's right to run down all womenkind but his own. This morning he was graciously pleased to approve.

'Well, Kuppord, we've had a glorious tuck-in,' said Bopper as he filled his pipe, while passing out of the main street of Bonny, 'though we should never get another.'

The last house in the village towards the south is a long one-storeyed building, with a little double-storeyed portion at the end nearest the village. It is particularly clean. At the time we saw it the whitewash was quite fresh. A tricolor, which was warranted always to wave in the breeze by the simple expedient of being made of iron, gave a hint, which a long signboard made explicit with the word 'Gendarmerie.'

As we approached, the postern of the courtyard gate was thrown open, and a little man sprang out. He had a pair of dark blue trousers, with a darker strip of blue down the side, a pair of spurs, a huge white apron, his shirt sleeves, and a bald head.

'Halt there!'

We halted there. For though the little man looked insignificant enough, he spoke authoritatively, and we noticed at the same time that two burly gendarmes in full uniform (except that they had the peaked cap instead of the genuine full-dress cocked hat) stepped out of the postern after him.

'You are English, aren't you?'

'As you say, sir.'

'You come from Gien?'

'Perfectly.'

'Will you have the goodness to enter?'

We had the goodness to enter.

We passed through the court to a stone-floored sort of office. As we entered, the door was shut behind us, and the thud of a musket butt hinted that one of the two outside had been told off to mount guard over us.

'Your papers.' The little man held out his hand.

Up till now Bopper had been delighted. It was his first arrest. I had gone through it twice before, and I dare say I had crowed just a little more than I ought to over his inexperience. He thought we were getting equal at last, but he did not like to

be bullied by a man in an apron. Besides, the gendarmes were outside now.

'Permit me to ask by what right you stop travellers on the high road?' Thus Bopper, with much dignity.

'Your papers,' repeated the little man sternly.

'May I ask whom I have the honour of addressing?' Bopper was severely suave.

'But, the Brigadier Dupont, sir.' The genuine astonishment of the good brigadier was enough to make us laugh. Bopper only added sarcastically,

'You haven't much the air of it.'

Stung by the sneer, the officer vanished through an inner door, to reappear a moment after in full uniform. Taking his seat at the desk he began.

'Without papers, I presume?'

Bopper was busy looking for a seat. He did not relish standing while the examiner sat. We had to pocket the affront, however, through lack of even a form. Bopper angrily retorted that 'papers' were no longer required, that we hadn't papers, and that we would like to know what this detention meant. Dupont merely took up a huge yellow paper form, and solemnly asked,

'Your surnames and Christian names?'

We gave these, and a great many more items as he asked them, and gravely wrote them down. Suddenly he turned upon us with a 'Now I've got you' air and asked:

'Your resources, if you please?'

At this veritable 'stand and deliver' Bopper, with some pride, produced his purse, containing some 700 francs.

'You didn't look like it, you know,' murmured the thunder-struck brigadier.

When I flourished over 1,000 francs before him he could only add,

'Nor you either.'

Pleased at the favourable impression our resources had made upon the poor brigadier, who had probably never seen so much money at one time in his life before, Bopper deigned to produce our railway return tickets from Paris to London. Dupont admitted this as evidence. But his next question startled us.

'Can you speak Spanish?'

This finished our examination. He would give no explanation. On the sounding of a little bell a gendarme entered and saluted.

He was not our keeper, whom we saw grimly keeping guard at the door. The brigadier handed his big report to the man, who withdrew.

Bopper returned to the charge that the police had no right to stop us on the highway. The brigadier admitted that papers were no longer necessary, but—

‘I am instructed to arrest you on a specific charge.’

‘What charge?’ we demanded together.

He only smiled slyly, and told us that an old hand like him was not so easily caught as all that. The only hint he would give us was that it would be twenty years at the hulks if proved against us. We felt secretly pleased at the obvious enormity of our offence.

‘English spies, of course?’ sneered Bopper.

‘English pickpockets more probably,’ retorted the brigadier, who certainly scored there; ‘but no, gentlemen, it is neither. I may be able to tell you when I get a reply to my telegram.’

‘Do you mean to say you telegraphed all that sheet about us?’ asked Bopper, with a pride he could hardly conceal.

‘But yes, perfectly; it’s the rule.’

‘Where did you telegraph to?’

‘Ah! gentlemen make questions. Pardon me.’

Our conceit in our own importance was seriously damaged by the interim reply.

‘Commandant at breakfast. Keep prisoners till further notice.’

Dupont was annoyed. Bopper was furious. I am a philosopher. The bell rang again. We were conducted to a sort of cell, where we had a form to sit on. We were locked in. We both felt secretly aggrieved at not being put into irons. Even the cell was a fraud. The window was very high up, it is true; but there was only one iron bar across it—a vertical one. We had no pallet of straw, or any of the regulation cell furniture. Instead, there was quite a collection of riding boots and spurs and belts hanging round the walls. On a shelf there were several brown-paper bundles. Standing upon our bench we could reach the shelf; but self-respect forbade.

The pleasant feeling soon wore off. It was intolerably hot. We were not in the least hungry, but we were very thirsty. I ventured to kick at the door. A man at once asked what was the matter. Our petition was immediately granted in the form of a pitcher of *l'eau de vigne*.

Two hours afterwards Dupont came himself to take us out. Our examination seemed perfectly satisfactory. Besides, the police at Gien had a clue. Only we were to be kept till five o'clock in case of accidents. If no word to the contrary came before then we were to be set free. Meanwhile we were kept in a very mild state of bondage. In fact, our cell was the kitchen. Madame Dupont wanted to converse with the terrible Englishmen.

Dupont had again put on his apron, and was busy dandling a little girl of four. Madame was preparing the beans for dinner. Bopper soon made his way into the parental hearts by undoing a bandage round the ears of the eldest—a boy of about nine—and after examination prescribing some specific. His home experience gave him an immense advantage over me in the good graces of the family.

Soon he began to worm out of the father the charge upon which we were detained. It was no less than 'Aiding a Spanish prisoner to escape from the State prison at Gien.'

The reasoning was conclusive. He had escaped during the very night we had been at Gien. We were foreigners. He was a foreigner. *Therefore*, we aided him to escape. The thing was as plain as a pikestaff. Dupont, however, put it in a somewhat better light for the authorities.

We had been making careful enquiries about the prison. (So that miserable château we so much admired was the State prison. Little wonder the gendarmes smiled at our desire to get into it!) We had sat for an hour on the bridge carefully examining it. In our hotel we continued our investigations so as to arouse the suspicions of our landlady. We had started at an unearthly hour in the morning. What would you have?

Put that way we had to admit that our case did not look quite so well.

After judiciously submitting to a little instruction from Madame in the art of preserving beans, Bopper ventured to pump Dupont again.

'What was the Spanish prisoner's crime?'

My opinion now is that Dupont did not know. He asserted that duty forbade him to tell.

'Only I may let you know that he had only been in prison for a fortnight (his term was fourteen years), and that he escaped during the night in his shirt.'

We were getting along splendidly. Bopper and I were quite

sure we were going to be asked to share the dinner we were helping to prepare, when hey, presto! another telegram from the Commandant spoiled everything.

That wire must have conveyed a snub of some kind to Dupont, for he at once stiffened up in the most disagreeable style, and snapped out to us—he did not even put in the ‘Messieurs’—

‘You may put yourselves *en route*.’

We took him at his word, and were soon swinging along the highway. As we passed the big stone marking the boundary between the Loiret and the Nièvre we heaved a united sigh at being out of the Commandant’s beat.

We began quite to understand the easy descent into the criminal classes. For days after our arrest we honestly preferred to keep out of the way of gendarmes, and not infrequently we made little détours to miss the iron flag and the signboard ‘Gendarmerie.’

I know this sketch is incomplete. As soon as we got home Bopper and I tried to get the details filled in. We wrote to the brigadier, enclosing a stamped and directed envelope, asking what was the Spaniard’s crime, and whether he was caught again.

No answer ever came. Either the brigadier never got over that final wire, or police regulations make it dangerous to answer such letters as ours.

For myself, I would be quite willing to stake all the untold wealth I possess that the prisoner was retaken. The Spaniard who is able to escape in his shirt from a State prison in the middle of France, and get clean away, will give St. Peter his own work to prevent him escaping the roll-call after the last trump.

MEMORY.

AN UNPUBLISHED POEM BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

WHEN the dead in their cold graves are lying
 Asleep, to wake never again,
 When past are their smiles and their sighing,
 Oh ! why should their memories remain ?

Though sunshine and spring may have lightened
 The wild flowers that blow on their graves ;
 Though summer their tombstones have brightened,
 And autumn have pall'd them with leaves ;

Though winter have wildly bewailed them
 With her dirge wind, as sad as a knell ;
 Though the shroud of her snow-wreath have veiled them,
 Still, how deep in our bosoms they dwell !

The shadow and sun-sparkle vanish,
 The cloud and the light fleet away ;
 But man from his heart may not banish
 Ev'n thoughts that are torment to stay.

The reflection departs from the river,
 When the tree that hung o'er is cut down ;
 But on Memory's calm current for ever
 The shade, without substance, is thrown.

When quenched in the glow of the ember,
 When the life-fire ceases to burn,
 Oh ! why should the spirit remember ?
 Oh ! why should the parted return ?

Because that the fire is *still* shining,
 Because that the lamp is still bright ;
 While the body in dust is reclining,
 The soul lives in glory and light.

HATESU.

My first object in going to Egypt was to get warm. When the thermometer stood at 99° in the shade at Assuan, I felt I had attained my heart's desire in that direction. My second object was to practise what Horace calls 'strenuous idleness.' People said, 'Go to Italy'; but that was manifestly absurd, for Mr. Ruskin, the old masters, and a thing called the Renaissance, pervade the entire country, and make life a burden to one. Then there was Athens. Well I recalled Lord Chesterfield's remark that no gentleman was required to know Greek and Latin, but that he certainly was expected to have forgotten them. This latter gentlemanly qualification I abundantly possessed, for I knew that the simplest Greek inscription would hopelessly floor me. So I turned my attention to Egypt. Everything there was so very long ago, and the Egyptian tongue itself such a very dead language, that no one could be expected to work at it. I had not been three days in Cairo before I found I had made a great mistake. In that very insanitary city there are many infectious diseases rambling about; but the one you are perfectly certain to catch is a deadly thing called Egyptology. When once it grips you, good-bye to quiet days. It was impossible to escape it. I saw people just back from the Nile, literally reeking of it, B.C. being stamped on every line of their faces. When your *table-d'hôte* neighbour rattles off dynasties like a multiplication table, it is best to cave in, and go quietly with the stream. There was a man at Shepheard's who bulged over his left breast: that bulge was due to a bronze figure of Horus acquired by him at some ophthalmic village up the Nile. Horus never was made for breast pockets; he is far too knobly; but he was of such extraordinary value that his owner lived in hourly dread of the Curator of the Gizeh Museum swooping down on him and claiming it. Everybody seemed to have annexed something, and they fetched their spoils out surreptitiously at dessert, and gloated over them. Then there were two radiant American girls who babbled of Amenhotef and Usertsen, and talked as familiarly of Phtah and Muht as I should of a common councilman. Practically, unless you could talk Egyptology, you were cut off from all conversation; so I

was drawn into the current. I bought Renouf's Egyptian Grammar, and many books on the history, art, and religion of Ancient Egypt. Now, there are a great many approved methods of going mad. You may study bimetallism, or plunge into party politics or religious controversy. I believe George Eliot had a leaning towards a course of the prophetic writings as a short cut to insanity. I myself consider that a dip into the ancient religion of Egypt is as good a method as any. Give a few hours to the local triads, try and find out the one god of Iamblichus, work in the solar myth, and then see how you feel. I left the religion alone, and turned to history. This subject also has its difficulties; to begin with, it playfully spreads itself over thirty-four dynasties. Three great authorities, Wilkinson, Mariette, and Brugsch, never by any chance agree as to dates. At the very outset, as to the date of Mena, the first historic king, they vary to the extent of 2,600 years; this is a margin you would hesitate to allow to your dearest friend. Then, as regards the social and art life of Egypt, nothing is more healthily lowering to the modern mind than to find Egypt continually saying, 'I told you so; and, what is more, I told you so some thousands of years ago.' Until I went to Egypt I had a lively admiration for Mr. Edison. It is true his inventions seem to complicate life; but, at any rate, they were new. After visiting Egypt, I believe half of them are simple infringements of old Egyptian ideas, the patents for which have long since expired. Professor Piazza Smyth is sure (I am not) that the Pyramid of Cheops contains a revelation of nearly all the scientific discoveries of the last 6,000 years. Egypt is a sphinx that is perpetually asking questions, and modern civilisation is perpetually 'giving up' the answers. Take the famous statue of Chephren, carved from a block of green diorite. Diorite is one of the hardest stones known: it holds its own against modern tools. How, and with what implements, did the old Egyptians carve it? Six thousand years ago bronze was common in Egypt: whence did they get their tin to make it? Six thousand years ago they produced the wonderful statue of the Village Sheik at Gizeh. It is infinitely superior to ninety-nine per cent. of modern English sculpture. Through what centuries of superb civilisation did this art develop, and slowly ripen to such perfection? After a preliminary survey of these and similar questions, it became manifest that, if Reason were to retain her seat, I must take certain prominent figures, and stick to them at all hazards.

I therefore selected Hatesu, Rameses II., and the Poem of Pentaur. I devote myself at present to Hatesu. You will observe that, in mercy to the British public, I have adopted a simplified spelling of her name. She herself liked variety, and you find her figuring variously as Ramaka, Amumos-net, Hatshepset-khnumt-Amen-Hatasou, and Hatshepsu. I was drawn to this queen for many reasons; amongst others, I saw a rubbing of her profile in the room of the man who had annexed the Horus, and it appealed to me. I thought I saw a vestige of expression in her face which Egyptian bas-reliefs seem to lack. After a time one wearies of the immortal calm and the monotonous repose, and craves for a touch of the more vulgar emotions. Directly I began to study Hatesu, I had to sacrifice one of my pet illusions—and that was the ‘modern woman.’ I was quite sure the older civilisations had nothing at all like her. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin set her going exactly ninety-nine years ago, and we have been developing her ever since; she is the crown and flower of our boasted civilisation; she is learned, athletic, independent; she combines the attributes of man and woman, and she breaks all conventional laws like packthread. Ibsen has put the coping-stone to her, and now she is complete. Hatesu looks calmly across three hundred centuries and says, ‘I was all this, and more.’ Hatesu claimed the attributes of a man; she dressed as a man, and even wore an artificial beard; she was described as ‘son of Amen,’ and in many of her inscriptions she is royally indifferent to grammar, and appears as ‘His Majesty herself.’ In energy, triumphant self-assertion, and the combination of manly qualities, with feminine tact and insight, Hatesu remains unapproachable. Her portrait bust shows us a woman of heroic type; she lifts her head fearlessly, and looks straight onwards. The eyes are deep set, the mouth resolute and masterful, the nose is Napoleonic. She came into the world about 1600 B.C.; so that, as Egyptian things go, she is comparatively modern; but she belongs to the triumphant XVIII. dynasty, and holds her place between two great conquerors, Thotmes I., her father, and Thotmes III., her brother. She was called the ‘Faithful Daughter’; for, like most notable women, she had an intense love for her father. At his death the throne passed to her jointly with her half-brother, Thotmes II. Now, Hatesu was in one respect like ‘Mr. F.’s Aunt’; ‘she hated a fool,’ and this Thotmes II. was a dim kind of creature, good-natured, and feeble, as you may see by his portrait.

Hatesu took matters in hand at once, and, according to Egyptian custom, married him straight away. That apparently did not lessen the difficulties, and after a while death removed him, and left the imperial lady free. They say Hatesu assisted death—who knows? it is all three thousand years ago. Perhaps she opened the cage of life to the feeble creature and let him go. Directly he was dead, Hatesu made a clean sweep of his cartouches throughout the land, putting her own or her father's in their place. She was a woman who did a thing thoroughly when she did it at all. There were two paramount duties that centuries of tradition laid upon every Egyptian monarch: the first was to be a great conqueror, the second a great builder. To swoop down on outlying tribes, to return with prisoners and booty, and then to blazon the record of it on rock and temple, on wall and obelisk—that was grateful to the mind of Pharaoh, and acceptable to his people.

After that each monarch set to work to build a temple that should surpass anything done before or likely to be done after. Karnak was the usual outlet and safety-valve for Egyptian vain-glory. This vast collection of temples was practically always in hand; round it centred the glory of the priesthood, the pride of the nation, and the individual vanity of each king. Usertsen I. began it, and the last name inscribed on its walls is Alexander II., so that its history extends over about 2,300 years. Unfortunately, Seti I. added the great hall, and so took the wind out of the sails of all his successors, for that hall is truly, as Stanley described it, 'the grandest building which the world ever raised to the glory and worship of God.' Hatesu did not attempt to surpass the unsurpassable, but she discovered work to do of a distinct character, and there, to this day, amidst those acres of ruins, she set up the finest obelisk in the world. I should like to say the highest too, but the authorities cannot agree even on a simple point like this. One would think any fool could measure an obelisk; however, it is variously estimated at 108 feet 10 inches, 97 feet 6 inches, and 92 feet. Any way, it is the most beautiful obelisk in the world, and, when one sees that wonderful pale rose-coloured shaft outlined clear against the radiant sky, one thanks Amen Ra and all the gods that it has not been carted off to rot beneath the smoky skies of London, Paris, or New York. It weighs 3,673 tons. I give this vulgar fact to enable you to understand the difficulties of dealing with such a mass. It is poised on its base with the

most exquisite precision exactly in the very axis of the temple. Originally there were two, but the other is shattered to fragments.

Wonderful beyond all wonders is the cutting of the hieroglyphics upon it—deep, sharp, and absolutely true. They record that 'She, Hatesu, the mistress of the Diadems, whose years do not wither, erected this monument to her father.' (One never knows exactly what Shakespeare did or did not know, but I suppose we may safely say he certainly could not read Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is strange, however, that in describing his Cleopatra—who was a weak version of Hatesu—he uses these very words, 'age cannot wither her.' Is the 'long arm of coincidence' long enough to reach back to 1600 B.C.?) She then covered the entire obelisk with gold, 'that it might shine over both lands like the sun's disc, pure gold taken from the chief of the nations.' Furthermore, she records how the whole of this magnificent business was carried through 'in seven months from the very beginning when first hewn out of the quarry in the mountain.' How often, as the royal lady swept past in her chariot, she would be gladdened by the sight of her great obelisk flashing back the burning rays of the sun! Deep in its base she carved the triumphant statement that 'never, since the creation of the world, has anything been made equal to those things set up by the child of the sun Hatesu.' This was a very good beginning, but the queen intended to fulfil the two royal duties—first to carry out a campaign, and secondly to build her own particular temple to the glory of the gods and of herself. In Southern Arabia there was a district known as the land of Punt. It was rich in gold and spices, silver and ebony, and the great queen coveted them. Setting to work in a practical way, she built five ships of war. If the tribes of Punt were open to commercial transactions well and good; if not, they should be instructed by summary methods. Luckily for us, Hatesu not only built her temple, but wrote, carved, and painted thereon the most charming and detailed history of her great trading expedition. From beginning to end it was an exceedingly prosperous business. Much barter and exchange took place—one may guess with distinct advantage to the Egyptians. The ships returned laden with gold, incense, slaves, ivory, and ebony. Then Hatesu had a glorious time; a great national festival began, the great queen sat on her golden throne and all the treasures were poured out at her feet. All this is recorded in a series of wonderful bas-reliefs at Deir-el-Bahari, the great temple Hatesu built

opposite Thebes. No other temple in Egypt is at all like it; it is built in a series of terraces hewn out of the hill-side, and along the front run a series of marvellous carvings cut in a beautiful white sandstone. They anticipate those days long after, when the navy of Tarshish 'came once in three years laden with gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.' Everything is here except the peacocks. Below, in the water, are carved many of the fish of the Red Sea, and so true to nature are they that each species can be identified, including a sole with one eye bigger than the other, which folks learned in such matters say shows a keen eye for nature. I dare say Hatesu had naturalists and artists attached to her court, and sent them with her expedition to Punt. She merely anticipated the voyage of the *Challenger* by a few thousand years. Along with the treasures came the Queen of Punt and many chiefs, and did homage to the royal Egyptian. Hatesu has represented the rival queen as a hideous dwarf, hunchbacked and distorted. (Did not Cleopatra describe Octavia as 'dwarfish'?) This may be feminine spite, or merely that the court artist found it easier to draw a sole than a woman. Never was a commercial transaction recorded in so picturesque a fashion. If one is to enter into trading relationship with one's neighbours, this is the spirit to do it in, and Hatesu's method of recording it seems infinitely superior to dull charter-parties, bills of lading, and custom-house routine. But now trouble was awaiting Hatesu. For fifteen years she reigned magnificently, keeping her young half-brother, Thotmes III., in subjection. Now the youth had grown to man's estate. He was a lad of very different metal from that other brother whom Hatesu swept away at the beginning of her reign. With the exception of Rameses II., he was destined to be the greatest of all Egyptian kings. For seven years they reigned together, but Hatesu still claimed the foremost place, and her name always stands first in the state records. Seven turbulent years, one fancies, and then the great queen disappeared; not a word, not a hint, comes to us from tomb or temple. As she was but forty years old, it seems likely that there was meted out to her the same measure that she dealt to Thotmes II. Directly the end came, her successor erased her name from all her monuments, and viciously hewed and hacked at the records of her greatness. Here and there, however, her cartouches are merely disfigured, not obliterated, and the name of the great queen still holds a prominent place on the long roll of Egyptian history. The end is

profoundly disappointing; we get to know Hatesu so well; and one is sure, whatever that end was, that she met it heroically. Jezebel, Cleopatra, Dido, Elizabeth, Marie Stewart—step by step we follow each stormy life till the curtain rushes down at the tremendous last exit. Perhaps Hatesu's end, no less than her career, was equally heroic and royal. She had reigned gloriously for fifteen years, she opened up a new commercial world for her country, she erected the finest obelisks and she built a glorious temple; then, in the prime of her vigorous womanhood, she steps out into the darkness, and the 'rest is silence.'

THE COUNTESS RADNA.

BY W. E. NORRIS,

AUTHOR OF 'MATRIMONY,' 'HEAPS OF MONEY,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRANK TAKES DECISIVE STEPS.

MRS. COLBORNE was both a good and a sensible woman; neither of which things prevented her from being, at times, an extremely irritating one. She had not the slightest idea that she was ever irritating; but she knew that bachelors, as well as men who by the force of unfortunate circumstances are compelled temporarily to lead the lives of bachelors, are apt to find the hospitality of their female relatives a restraint upon them; so she raised no objections in answer to a timid suggestion on her son's part that it would, perhaps, be rather more convenient for everybody if he were to domicile himself elsewhere than in Elvaston Place during the remainder of the Session. He had meditated this step for a long time, but had hesitated to carry it into execution; because, for one thing, the share which he had taken in defraying the household expenses had naturally been a help to his mother, who was not too well off, and, for another, he had been afraid that her feelings would be hurt by his departure. However, to his great relief, she reassured him upon the latter point, while consenting cheerfully and gratefully to certain financial arrangements which he had thought it right to make.

'My dear boy,' she said, 'I quite understand that it is impossible for you to keep regular hours just now, and a bore for you to feel that in a small household like mine regular hours must be kept. I only hope that before long you may have a big household of your own once more, and in the meantime I am sure Eliza Watts will do all she can to make you comfortable.'

This was handsome behaviour, and Douglas acknowledged it to be such; although, in truth, it had not been any necessity for keeping regular hours that had rendered his mother's house an irksome place of residence to him. Whatever might be the cause assigned for his change of quarters, he was glad enough to be able

to effect it with so little trouble, and he accordingly shifted himself and his belongings to the lodgings in Clarges Street which were kept by Mrs. Watts, who had been head-housemaid at Stoke Leighton until she had espoused the butler and retired into private life.

On the morning after the Duchess of Brentford's charitable entertainment he was dawdling over a late breakfast and mentally recapitulating some of the incidents of the previous evening, when Frank Innes was announced. His visitor, as he immediately noticed, wore the aspect of one who has a purpose before him and likewise of one who is doubtful whether his purpose will meet with sympathy or approval. Therefore, after pointing to an armchair and pushing the cigarettes across the table, he asked :

'Have you come to beg for applause? Well, I do applaud you, and I applauded you last night with all my hands and feet. It was a legitimate triumph—only, if you'll forgive my saying so, you must beware of imagining that triumphs of that sort mean more than they really do mean.'

'Oh, they may mean a lot,' Frank declared, seating himself and lighting a cigarette; 'it just depends upon circumstances. What that little success has meant for me is that it has brought me offers which I think I should be an ass to refuse. A good many people were waiting to see how I should pull through; and now they're satisfied, it seems. The long and the short of it is that, if I go in for the stage, I shall be pretty sure of making a modest fortune, whereas by sticking to the Office I can't hope ever to make more than bread and butter, and not too much of that. So I've made up my mind to chuck the Office. I thought I ought to tell you; though I'm afraid you won't approve. All the same, you know, the stage is quite the right thing nowadays; the old-fashioned prejudices about it are completely out of date.'

That was possibly true; and yet one might be old-fashioned enough to cling to them. Douglas could not relish the idea of seeing his cousin's name printed in enormous letters and carried through the streets by a sandwich-man; he could not feel that a gentleman has any business to appeal to the public in that particular way, nor was he at all convinced of the wisdom of throwing up a small certainty for the sake of a problematical fortune. After a long pause, he said :

'To tell you the truth, I don't approve; I can't see much difference between a professional singer and a professional rider or

cricketer. Still you are your own master, and you aren't in any way bound to consult me. Your father won't be best pleased though, will he ?'

'Pleased ! Why, he'll be simply foaming at the mouth—fit to be tied ! He would cut me off with a shilling if he had a spare shilling to cut me off with ; only he hasn't, you see. In process of time he will most likely become reconciled to what can't be helped ; and if he doesn't—well, I must try to get on without him. He has allowed me to get on as best I could without him for some time past, and I really don't think that duty compels me to impoverish myself out of deference to his strait-laced notions. It is different with you ; because I couldn't have got on at all unless you had assisted me, Douglas ; and I'm not ungrateful, though I haven't said much about it.'

'Oh, you mustn't think that you are under the smallest obligation to me,' returned the other, reddening a little ; 'I inherited sundry charges which I couldn't possibly have disregarded with common honesty. And, talking about inheritances,' he added presently, 'I may as well tell you now what I have thought of telling you several times before—that Stoke Leighton will probably come to you or to your eldest son when I die. You may say that that makes no practical change in the situation ; and perhaps it doesn't, considering my age and the strength of my constitution. Still it is customary for a man to make some preliminary provision for his heir, and, as matters stand, nobody could call it very imprudent on my part to promise you a somewhat increased income. I can't specify the exact amount at this moment ; I should think that in a few years' time it might be considerably larger than I could afford to make it now ; but——'

'My dear old man,' interrupted Frank, 'don't talk such outrageous nonsense ! It's awfully good of you ; but at the same time you are talking utter nonsense, and I don't want to hear any more of it. A few months hence your wife will be back in England, and long before you die you will have sons as big as yourself to pay for and keep in order. Did you have a talk with that Italian chap last night ? I hoped you would.'

'I had a short talk with him,' answered Douglas, smiling. 'As far as I could judge from the very few observations with which he thought fit to honour me, he has not come to London precisely as an ambassador of peace. Not that he, or any ideas that he may have formed about me, signify in the slightest degree : I am to all

intents and purposes a divorced man, minus the power to marry again; and, as such, I have a right to choose my successor. I don't claim a right to dictate to him what his career should be; but perhaps I may make so bold as to indicate my preferences.'

Frank absolutely refused to accept this as an accurate or reasonable description of the state of affairs, and a discussion ensued which proved as barren of results as ninety-nine discussions out of every hundred do. Douglas did not care to refer to the letter which he had received from Bickenbach, while his cousin, who knew nothing more of Leonforte than that he was a friend of the Countess's, could give no plausible reasons for imagining that that lady had despatched her friend to London in the character of a go-between. The upshot of it all was that the younger man gained what he had originally called in Clarges Street with the hope of gaining, inasmuch as Douglas acknowledged that he was entitled to dispose of his future life as might seem best to him.

'I musn't assert privileges which you refuse to grant me,' the latter ended by saying, 'and, since you won't hear of being treated as my heir, it isn't for me to object to your strutting about upon the operatic stage. Only I do hope and trust that you are not deluding yourself into the belief that Lord and Lady Burcote won't object to it—and to you.'

Frank stroked his chin and said: 'You think they *will* object, eh?'

'My poor boy, what a question! I am not sure; but I should imagine that they would object even if you were—is there a millionaire tenor in existence?—well, let us say, even if you were a male Patti. However, as you are nothing of the sort and can't, under the most favourable circumstances, become anything of the sort for a great many years to come, the hypothesis isn't worth considering. Moreover, as a matter of detail, you would have to get Lady Florence's consent, which you haven't got yet, I presume.'

'Not yet.'

'Then, for goodness' sake, go and ask for it; I couldn't give you sounder advice. If that young lady's reply doesn't open your eyes, I shall be very much astonished. I don't want to appear unfeeling, but really and truly, the sooner you are brought to your senses the better it will be for you.'

Whether Douglas's advice was sound or not, Frank fully intended to act upon it, and he did not fail to present himself in Eaton Square, that same afternoon, at the hour named by Lady

Florence. She had asked him to come, and he could not help thinking that, in doing so, she must have been pretty well aware of what he would say to her, supposing that an opportunity for private conversation should be accorded to him. The only thing that troubled him was that he did not quite see what likelihood there was of his obtaining such an opportunity. He saw still less likelihood of it after he had been ushered into the drawing-room, which was full of people who were drinking tea and eating cakes. Lady Burcote, who had her bonnet on, welcomed him with a gracious smile, and with that extraordinary perpendicular shake of the hand which has, for some inscrutable reason, been adopted as a modern method of salutation.

'I hope you are not worn out by your labours of last night, Mr. Innes,' said she. 'Everybody seems to have been quite charmed; but the heat of the room certainly was something appalling, and Florry has earned such a headache as her reward that she says she would be sick if she came with me to a drill-hall where I shall have to run off and distribute prizes presently. I'm rather seedy myself; but nobody ever offers to relieve me of tiresome duties.'

For obvious reasons, it was impossible to tell by the colour of Lady Burcote's face what the state of her health might be; but Lady Florence did not look seriously indisposed. Frank, however, remembered that she had proclaimed her intention of having a headache, and drew deductions which were not unsatisfactory to him from the circumstance that she had one. What would be eminently satisfactory would be for her mother to get up and go; and in a very few minutes this is what her mother actually did. It may be surmised that Lady Burcote saw no sort of danger in permitting an outsider like young Innes to remain behind her.

'I'm sorry to leave you, good people,' said she, as she hastened towards the door; 'but my time is up, and Florry will look after you. Breathe a prayer for me; it will be required of me to smile and make engaging little speeches to a crew of perspiring tradesmen and mechanics for the next hour and a half!'

So far so good; but Lady Burcote's friends did not follow her example and quit the premises with as much alacrity as they might have displayed, had they known how very anxious her ladyship's substitute was to get rid of them. They dispersed gradually by twos and threes, lingering in a most provoking manner after they had risen from their chairs and had put on

their gloves; one very objectionable old woman outstayed all the others, and evidently harboured the fell design of outstaying Frank also. At length, however, the mournful silence with which her observations were received triumphed over her pertinacity, and, as Frank held the door open for her, he acknowledged, with inward thankfulness, that Fortune had not been unkind to him.

It may be thought that Lady Florence, in making undisguised arrangements for this *tête-à-tête*, meant to be very kind to him too, and that, if she did not intend to accept him, she must at least have intended him to propose to her; but in reality such was not the case. Nobody takes precautions against obvious impossibilities, and not even Lady Burcote herself could have been more convinced than her daughter was of the impossibility of Mr. Innes as a marriageable man. She gave him credit for intelligence enough to understand that sentimentality is a luxury reserved for the rich and the disinterested, and that she could not be included in either category. She knew, of course, that he admired her; but she did not think him so foolish as to imagine that his admiration could lead to anything so preposterous as an engagement, and when she had invited him to what she felt must partake of the nature of a farewell interview, she had simply acted in obedience to the law which impels us all to get what we want, if we can. It was, perhaps, an inherited instinct that had caused her to bow to a law of which the overwhelming cogency had always been recognised in her family.

And so it came to pass that she was utterly amazed and taken aback by the impassioned declaration which Frank lost no time in pouring forth. It did not displease her to hear that he loved her; but it frightened her a good deal, and she told him so.

'It is rather too bad of you,' she added reproachfully, 'to go on like this, after all the trouble that I took to secure a last talk with you! Because it stands to reason that we shan't meet very often, now that the theatricals are over, and I am afraid what you have just said will put it out of the question for me to meet you at all in future, except as a mere acquaintance.'

'Does that mean that you don't care a straw for me?' asked the young man dolorously.

'Oh, I don't know!—what difference would it make if I cared a whole stack of straws for you? You know what Mamma is, and what we have all of us been made to do. I suppose, if the worst came to the worst, I couldn't be absolutely forced to marry a man

whom I hated, and perhaps I shan't be forced to marry Lord Galashiels; but I can very easily be prevented from marrying a man whom I don't hate.'

'You don't hate me, then? Well, that's something!'

'It isn't much. It would be if you had Lord Galashiels's income, but as you haven't——'

'Won't you for one moment—just for one moment—put income out of sight? Supposing that there were no such thing as money, and that we were all living in Arcadia upon the fruits of the earth, could you, do you think, love me a little bit?—about a tenth part, let us say, as much as I love you?'

The girl gazed at him for a short space, and then, much to his surprise and dismay, burst into tears. She had been brought up after that fashion; she had never been taught to control herself; she had been accustomed, just as her sisters had been, to give way to her emotions every now and then; almost the only lesson which had been forcibly impressed upon her had been that emotions have very little to say to the practical business of life. Her sisters had cried and had obeyed orders; it had been permitted to them to do the one so long as they did the other; and her own fate, as well as her conduct, seemed likely to be moulded in accordance with precedent.

Possibly there was no serious departure from precedent in the course adopted by Frank Innes, whose arms enfolded her, and who was whispering endearing epithets into her ears before she could stop him; but in all probability she was the first member of her family who had ever been invited, as she presently was, to brave the prohibition of her parents and entrust herself and her future to the care of a man whose own future was far from being assured. After a time she dried her eyes, thrusting him away from her and trying to laugh; but Frank declared that it was no laughing matter.

'Now that I know you love me,' said he resolutely, 'it isn't little every-day difficulties that will scare me into giving you up. We shall have enough to live upon; I'm sure of that, and that's the essential point. I don't expect Lady Burcote to welcome me with open arms; but what of that? She can't have everything her own way, and I suppose we might manage to get along without her benediction—you and I.'

The girl shook her head sadly. 'You don't know what you are talking about,' she answered. 'I am absolutely positive that

neither my mother nor my father would hear of our marrying; it isn't to be thought of! Besides, I am not of age.'

Did that matter? Frank was not quite sure whether it did or not; so he waived the point. 'Parents may turn rusty at first,' said he; 'but in the long run they are bound to give in, if the man who wants to marry their daughter is able to support her, and there isn't really the slightest doubt about my power to earn as much as we shall require. Anyhow, I can but ask Lord Burcote—and I will.'

'For Heaven's sake, don't do anything so crazy as that!' exclaimed the girl. 'You think he is good-natured, and so he is, in a way; but before you have said a dozen words to him he will have sent you flying out of doors and forbidden you ever to show your face here again.'

'Well, we shall see. But if I am not to speak to your father, what *am* I to do?'

'I don't know,' answered Lady Florence forlornly. 'Give up thinking about me, I suppose.'

'You might as well tell me to go and hang myself at once! No; I'll chance that encounter with Lord Burcote. It's the only straight thing to do, and I don't believe it will turn out half as disastrously as you imagine. There will be trouble, as a matter of course; but I should think we had pluck enough between us to face that, haven't we?'

'It isn't a question of pluck,' returned the girl; 'all the pluck in the world wouldn't help you or me to jump ten feet into the air. What would be worth tons of pluck to us at this moment would be an ounce or two of common sense; if we had any common sense at all, we should just say good-bye and have done with it.'

But neither she nor he, it must be assumed, possessed a sufficient share of the valuable quality alluded to; for before they parted, it had been agreed between them that Frank should at least try his luck. Even if he should fail—as she declared that he was inevitably predestined to do—he would not be so very much worse off than he was already.

CHAPTER XXX.

LORD BURCOTE DOES HIS DUTY.

FRANK INNES was young; he had always led as healthy a life as any man can lead whose avocations compel him to reside in London; he slept soundly and regularly during eight hours out of the twenty-four, and his digestion was in admirable working order. Consequently, it was well within his capacities to take a sanguine view of a desperate situation. Why, indeed, should the situation be accounted desperate? It would have been so, no doubt, if Lady Florence had refused him, or if he had no prospect of being able to maintain a wife in comfort; but, since she had confessed that she loved him, and since his prospects were of the rosiest description, he felt not only entitled but in honour bound to anticipate ultimate success. He was, of course, prepared for a preliminary rebuff, just as he was prepared for that vituperative epistle which was sure to be hurled at him from Scotland in answer to his announcement that he proposed to seek his fortune as a public singer; but these were obstacles to deter the timid, not the resolute, and he had few misgivings as to his power to surmount them and to pass the winning-post a long way in advance of that heavy competitor of his, Lord Galashiels.

It was, therefore, without serious alarm, though not without anticipation of an unpleasant quarter of an hour, that he returned to Eaton Square early on the ensuing morning and asked to see Lord Burcote. Lady Florence had told him that, if he was determined to speak to her father, his best plan would be to call about breakfast-time. 'I don't suppose anything can make much difference,' she had said; 'still, as a rule, Papa is more amiable just after breakfast than at any other hour of the day—that is, unless his letters have been particularly disagreeable.'

Frank saw some reason to apprehend that Lord Burcote's letters had been more disagreeable than usual on that especial morning; for when his lordship entered the library, into which the young man had been ushered, there were heavy clouds upon his brow and his lips were tightly set. People who were in the habit of buying horses of Lord Burcote or selling horses to him knew that he could look uncommonly grim at times, and were aware that when his lower jaw began to project, there was little or

no hope of getting the better of him. His lower jaw was ominously prominent as he said :

‘Good morning, Mr. Innes. You want to speak to me about something?’

Yes,’ answered Frank, who had made up his mind not to show the white feather, and who recognised the futility of attempting to break matters gently ; ‘I want to speak to you about something which I’m afraid you won’t like. The fact is that, yesterday afternoon, I told your daughter I loved her, and asked her to marry me.’

‘That,’ remarked Lord Burcote, ‘was pretty cool of you.’

‘I know it was ; but I couldn’t help myself : there are things which no human being can help saying when he gets the chance. Of course I haven’t the smallest pretension to be Lady Florence’s equal, and I dare say you will think that she ought to have refused me point-blank. But she didn’t. And, as she didn’t, I could do no less than apply to you and endeavour to show you that, if you give your consent to our marriage, you won’t be handing your daughter over to an absolute pauper. At the present moment, I confess, I am about as poor as I can be ; but by this time next year, if all goes well, I shall be quite comfortably off. I have brought a few letters with me for you to look at : you will see by them that my voice is worth money, and that, if I sing in public next season—as I mean to do—I shan’t want for engagements.’

‘I won’t trouble you to exhibit your correspondence, thank you,’ answered Lord Burcote. ‘I sincerely hope, for your sake, that you will contract a large number of satisfactory engagements ; but an engagement to my daughter will not be one of them. I don’t know whether you wish me to give my reasons for declining this honour. I will, if you like ; but I should think it would be superfluous.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Frank, ‘it would be superfluous to demonstrate to me that I am not what the world at large would call a suitable match for her ; I don’t assert that I am. Still this is a free country, Lord Burcote, and if your daughter is content to accept what I have to offer——’

‘Oh, but she isn’t,’ interrupted Lord Burcote ; ‘that’s just where you make a mistake. I may as well tell you at once that she has spoken to her mother and to me about this stupid affair, and she has been made to understand that it can’t possibly be

allowed to go any farther. I don't blame you—it is ridiculous to blame anybody in cases of this kind—but I trust that, for your own sake as well as for ours, you will see the propriety of retiring quietly. Why make a fuss when it is so obvious that you can gain nothing by fussing?’

‘I don't know what you mean by making a fuss,’ returned Frank; ‘but I know that I shan't retire, either quietly or noisily, until I hear from Lady Florence herself that she has changed her mind.’

‘My good man, she hasn't a mind to change. She may have, or think she has, some sort of vague fancy for you; but it is out of the question for her to indulge it, and neither her mother nor I can entertain your suggestion for a moment. Between ourselves, I should be greatly obliged if you would go away before her mother comes in here and says nasty things to you. You will have to go away in any case, don't you see; and one would rather not have a scene if one could avoid it.’

The scene, however, could not be avoided. Lady Burcote may have distrusted the firmness of her lord and master, or she may have been unwilling to deny herself the satisfaction of telling some home truths to one who had so shamefully abused her hospitality: at all events, she entered the room before Frank had time to make any rejoinder, and apostrophised him in a tone akin to that which she might have employed towards some dishonest tradesman.

‘Really, Mr. Innes,’ she began, ‘I am astounded at your impudence in coming here and worrying Lord Burcote after the manner in which you have behaved. Your conduct has been simply infamous; but it would be a waste of time and breath to dwell upon that, and perhaps I ought to have known better than to admit you into the house. The least you can do now is to leave it immediately; for I need scarcely tell you that our acquaintance must be considered at an end.’

‘I am not a bit ashamed of anything that I have done, Lady Burcote,’ returned Frank, ‘and I am not going to take my dismissal from you. As far as blood goes, ours is about as good as yours; so that it is a mere question of money. I admit that I haven't much money in the bank as yet; but I was saying just now that I have had offers of lucrative engagements as a public singer, and I see nothing infamous in my having asked Lady Florence to share my prospects, such as they are.’

'Nothing infamous in your having asked my daughter to share the prospects of a public singer! Well, it is charitable to assume that you have taken leave of your senses. Florence is very young and very foolish; but I must say for her that she was not quite so idiotic as to allude to *that* agreeable prospect! Perhaps you will be good enough to accept my assurance on her behalf that she has not the remotest intention of degrading herself in the way that you appear to think practicable.'

'I don't think I am quite good enough for that, Lady Burcote,' answered Frank, whose temper was beginning to give way a little. 'You have already called me infamous; so you won't be surprised to hear that my infamy goes the length of suspecting your veracity. I knew you would object to the engagement, and I don't quarrel with you for objecting to it, but I won't be rejected simply because you are pleased to say that it is degrading to sing in public. If Lady Florence had chosen to reject me for that reason, or for any other reason, I should have had to submit; only, as you know, she hasn't rejected me.'

Lord Burcote, who had sat, with his hands in his pockets, listening to the above dialogue, and who, notwithstanding his stern expression of countenance, had probably been secretly longing to effect his escape, here remarked: 'I think, Selina, you had better oblige Mr. Innes. Send for the girl and let her reject him formally. Then, I suppose, he will see that there is no more to be said.'

Lady Burcote was not accustomed to being defied, and would have preferred to sweep all troublesome and obstructive individuals out of her path with her own hand; but, reflecting that, when an object has to be accomplished, it is always advisable to accomplish it by the most effectual means at command, she rang the bell and told the servant who answered it to summon her daughter. After a few minutes, during which the combatants neither looked at nor addressed one another, Lady Florence appeared, with a pale, frightened face.

'Florence,' said her mother, 'Mr. Innes desires—rather inconsiderately, I think, but that is more his affair than ours—to hear from your own lips that you are sorry for having been betrayed into making a fool of yourself yesterday, and that you have no idea of disobeying us by engaging yourself to him.'

Lady Florence looked down at the carpet and murmured: 'I told him at the time that you would never hear of it.'

'Yes, my dear; and he was probably aware of that at the time, without your telling him. But what your father seems to think it necessary for you to say to Mr. Innes now is that you refuse him of your own accord.'

Then Lady Florence raised her eyes and met those of her lover. 'I'm afraid I must,' said she. 'I wish you hadn't insisted upon my saying so—though it was nice of you to insist upon it—and—and—I'm sorry. But I'm afraid I must.'

'I won't take that as an answer,' cried Frank hotly; 'you have been intimidated, and your aren't responsible for your words. Engagement or no engagement, I don't count myself released from my promise, and I hope you won't count yourself released from yours.'

Lady Burcote opened her lips to speak, but thought better of it. Obviously the moment had arrived for the head of the family to assert himself, and she made an imperious sign to him to that effect. Thereupon Lord Burcote pulled himself together and discharged a painful duty with dignity.

'Mr. Innes,' said he, 'you cannot, as a gentleman, persist. You asked for a distinct rejection from my daughter herself, and you have been given what you asked for; you really must not expect our forbearance to stretch any farther than that.' His lordship paused for an instant, and then added, somewhat irritably: 'I have told you already that I don't blame you; but I shall blame you very much indeed if you don't go away immediately. Surely it must be evident to you by this time that the only thing you can do is to go away!'

It was indeed evident that, since Lady Florence remained silent, that was the only thing to be done; yet Frank was reluctant to acknowledge himself beaten. He picked up his hat and stick, and said:

'Of course I can't stay here after you have requested me to go away, Lord Burcote; only, before I go, I wish to repeat that I consider myself dismissed by you, not by your daughter. I am still bound to her, although you seem to have frightened her into denying that she is bound to me.'

Lady Florence glanced up at him quickly and murmured: 'It wouldn't be of the slightest use for me to pretend that we were engaged; I warned you that it wouldn't. And all I can say is that, come what may, I won't marry Lord Gal——'

'Florence!' interrupted her mother sharply, 'you forget where

you are and what you are saying. Now that Mr. Innes knows all he can possibly require to know, you had better leave us.'

Lady Florence obediently withdrew ; and Frank, after allowing her sufficient time to get upstairs, followed her example. His defeat was absolute ; yet he was not wholly disconsolate ; for the girl, before leaving the room, had contrived to throw him a swift glance of which he had correctly interpreted the significance. She was resigned to bidding him farewell, because everybody must needs be resigned to the inevitable ; but, in spite of all, she loved him and meant to be true to him.

That was all very well, so far as it went ; the misfortune was that it did not go very far. She might, and he believed that she would, hold out against Galashiels ; she might for a certain length of time keep faith with a man whom she would never be permitted to meet ; but the most obstinate fidelity has its limits, and what hope was there of his being able to apply the needful spur to hers ? What hope, in truth, was there that when he should have made his fortune and she should be of age, she would be still unmarried and still tenacious of a bygone *affaire de cœur* ? 'She will have had to pass through such a heap of experiences between this and then !' reflected Frank, with a sigh.

Now, it was highly creditable to Peggy Rowley that when her friends were in trouble they turned instinctively to her. She was known to have helped many a lame dog over many a stile ; but probably it was not so much on that account that she was made the recipient of such numerous confidences as because those who sought her sympathy or assistance felt her to be eminently trustworthy. Frank, at all events, could not have expected her to assist him in his present unhappy strait ; yet he lay in wait for her, and, having secured her ear, poured forth into it the whole history of his woes.

'Well,' she said, when he had made an end of speaking ; 'I am sorry for you and even more sorry for her ; but I don't see what I can do for either of you. Fortunately or unfortunately, Gretna Green is a thing of the past, and if you won't submit to dire necessity, I'm afraid there is nothing for it but to possess your soul in patience. It is just possible—just wildly possible—that you may make a few thousands of pounds by singing persistently for the next three or four years, and that, when you have accomplished that much, she may be prepared to snap her fingers in her mother's face and marry you ; but, to be cruelly candid, I should

think the odds were enormous against the double event coming off. Love isn't eternal, you see: at any rate, it isn't so in the case of nine people out of every ten.'

'I'm one of the exceptional tenths,' Frank declared boldly. 'I can't tell whether she is another or not; I wish I could. That's just it; there are so many things which I wanted to say to her, and which I shall never have the chance of saying now, worse luck!'

Peggy shook her head. 'I really couldn't do it,' said she; 'you must see for yourself that it wouldn't be honest or fair or in any way permissible. If it had been a mere question of a farewell interview, with the clear understanding that the interview was to be final, I might perhaps—though I don't know that I should have been justified even then. But if you imagine that I am going to add to all my previous indiscretions by asking that girl to tea and asking you to meet her, you deceive yourself—you do indeed! I have a conscience, and I know my duty to my neighbour, little as I love neighbours like Lady Burcote and Lord Galashiels.'

'My dear Miss Rowley,' exclaimed Frank gratefully, 'I never dreamt of such a thing! But if you could, and if you would!'

'I couldn't and I wouldn't,' returned Peggy; 'haven't I just told you so? Be off, and don't bother me any more! I have bothers enough of my own, without taking charge of yours into the bargain. Besides, I have a prejudice in favour of keeping my hands clean. I won't be mixed up with intrigues.'

But if Peggy Rowley's conscience was hard, her heart was soft, and it not unfrequently happened to her to indulge the impulses of the latter, in spite of the behests of the former. She was doubtless unpardonable in arranging, three days later, a meeting at her house between Lady Florence Carey and Frank Innes; but she did that unpardonable thing, and she has since openly declared that she does not repent of her sin.

Frank was not very much surprised when he was asked to tea; he was not in the least surprised to find Lady Florence seated with his hostess when he arrived in response to the latter's invitation, and he was more grateful than astonished when, after the lapse of about ten minutes, Peggy rose and left the room, without so much as alleging a pretext for so doing. It was awfully good of her; but then she was awfully good, notwithstanding her occasional roughness of speech. This was what he said to Lady Florence, who answered:

'Oh, I don't know. I suppose she means to be kind; but I am not the sort of heroine that she takes me for, and I can't do the things that she would do in my place. What Mamma said to you the other day was perfectly true: I'm very sorry for having been betrayed into making a fool of myself.'

'I don't believe it,' returned Frank audaciously. 'You are frightened of your mother, as well you may be; but from the moment that you have acknowledged that you love me, you can't want or expect me to give you up.'

'It is I who have given you up; I couldn't do otherwise; though I dare say it seems simple enough to you to say "I will" or "I won't." The only thing I can say is that I won't marry Lord Galashiels, and I'm sure I don't know whether I shall be able to go on saying that if he is obstinate. It is so easy for you men to get your own way that you can't possibly understand how hard it is for a girl to get hers.'

'I think I do understand,' Frank replied. 'I can't ask more of you just now than that you should trust me and wait; if I didn't know that you love me, I wouldn't ask as much. I'm afraid we shan't be allowed to meet or speak again, unless Miss Rowley chooses to befriend us; but I do want you to believe that, whatever happens, I shan't change; and when you are of age——'

'You will have changed by that time,' Lady Florence interrupted; 'everybody does, and there's no help for it. I won't deceive you by promising anything, except that I'll drive Lord Galashiels away, if I can.'

That was all that he could obtain from her at the end of an argument which was diversified by some tears and by at least one embrace. During the progress of it he was divided between pity for the girl whom he loved and irritation at what seemed to him very like cynicism and heartlessness on her part. He had asserted that he understood her position; but he did not really understand it, and probably no one except the daughter of a thoroughly unscrupulous woman could have realised all its difficulties. Lady Florence had taken her departure before Peggy Rowley re-entered the room and said:

'Well, are you convinced now?'

'Convinced of what?' asked Frank. 'I am convinced that she is in her mother's power for the present, if that is what you mean.'

'Ah, that means a great deal. Perhaps you are also convinced

by this time that I gave you sound advice when I warned you against falling in love with poor Florry. You chose to do it, and now you have got to suffer for it. I don't pity you, and it wasn't for your sake that I disgraced myself by asking you here to-day. You'll get over it. Ask your cousin Douglas; he will tell you that there are heaps of consolations open to a man in the prime of life—politics, cricket, hunting, what you please. Men can go in for a hundred things; but women, say what they will, can only go in for one thing. And it's never worth their while to do that. Still I'm glad that Florry should have had the poor comfort of listening to your protestations, which I'm sure were sincere—for the time being.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BLOODLESS ENCOUNTER.

PEGGY ROWLEY was quite right in affirming that men have many other things to go in for besides making love and worrying themselves over the complications which are only too apt to arise out of a phase of experience through which it is the destiny of all mortals to pass at least once during their sojourn here below. Trite though the reflection may be, it is nevertheless as true as trite reflections always are, that the essential superiority of men over women consists chiefly in the power which the former possess and the latter lack of thinking of one thing at a time and to dismiss what they most care for from their minds while they are attending to matters of minor importance. It was a matter of minor importance to Douglas Colborne whether he became an Under-Secretary of State or not, whereas his wife's relations towards him and towards other men were—or, if they were not, he honestly believed that they were—matters of supreme importance to him. But the question of that possible Under-Secretaryship had to be considered, certain *pourparlers* had to be exchanged, daily business had to be transacted, social duties had to be performed; and so it was that, after the Duchess of Brentford's entertainment, he had little leisure for speculating upon what the Italian who had been introduced to him on that occasion could have meant by conduct which had been decidedly provocative and almost insolent. What he said to himself when his memory and his curiosity did for a time busy themselves with that eccentric individual was that it is never

advisable to meet trouble half-way, and that, if the Marchese had anything more to say to him, the Marchese knew, at any rate, where to find him. An ardent lover or a jealous husband would have been less cool, perhaps ; but Douglas was not of that opinion. He had never wavered in his allegiance to his wife ; he was ready to receive her back at a moment's notice ; he had nothing to reproach himself with. But she had put it completely out of his power to take any step so far as she was concerned. It was for her, or for someone deputed by her, to make the next move ; and, all things considered, it seemed scarcely probable that the Marchese di Leonforte had been despatched to England as her deputy. After some days he came to the conclusion that the Countess's admirer—if indeed the man was her admirer—had not, after all, crossed the Channel with the amiable intention of treading upon his toes, and he was slightly surprised when, one morning, just as he was finishing his breakfast, his servant brought him a glazed card upon which was inscribed, beneath a coronet, the name and title of his potential foe. The gentleman, he was told, was waiting to hear whether Mr. Colborne would receive him, and Mr. Colborne at once replied : ‘ Oh, certainly ; ask him to come in.’

It was not in order to tread upon the toes of a man who was very much in his way that the Marchese de Leonforte had driven in a hansom to Clarges Street that morning. One must needs accept the inconveniences together with the conveniences of the epoch in which one lives, and Leonforte had become convinced, somewhat against his will, that he must forego the satisfaction of dealing summarily with the Countess Radna's husband. He had informed himself ; he had asked a few questions and had heard all that he wanted to hear, without having appeared inquisitive. He still thought that it would be very delightful to plunge a *fleuret de combat* into some part of Mr. Colborne's person which did not contain a vital organ ; he was still unable to comprehend how English people managed to settle their differences while declining to have recourse to sword or pistol, and he was still doubtful as to whether the Countess had not meant him to avenge her after that fashion ; but he had ascertained as a fact that Englishmen really and truly do not fight duels any more ; and what in the world is to be done with a man who will neither fight you nor be accounted disgraced for having refused to fight you ? The innocent Leonforte, after much meditation, thought that he knew what to do with Mr. Colborne. During the past few days he had

talked with men and he had talked with women, and his suspicions had received ample confirmation. It seemed to be evident and notorious that Mr. Colborne, if he were free, would marry Miss Rowley; and why should not Mr. Colborne be set free? It was provoking and humiliating to be driven to make terms with so despicable a fellow and to reward, instead of punishing, him for his infidelity; but there are no insuperable difficulties in the way of pardoning those whom one despises, and it had to be remembered that his emancipation was necessary for that of a far more worthy person. Therefore he followed his card into Douglas's presence with as courteous and conciliatory an air as he could induce his features to assume.

The two men had to shake hands. Each of them hesitated, before going through that ceremony, just long enough to convey an impression of reluctance to the other; but neither of them wanted to begin quarrelling without preliminaries, and Leonforte did not want to quarrel at all. Why should he, since it seemed that the customs of the country forbade him to quarrel in any rational or satisfactory manner? He did not take the arm-chair towards which he was motioned, but, seating himself upon a higher and less comfortable one, opened the proceedings by saying:

'You are, perhaps, surprised to receive a visit from me, sir?'

'Delighted,' answered Douglas, politely.

'I can only accept that assurance as a figure of speech. After what passed between us on the occasion of our previous meeting, it is impossible that my company can be a source of pleasure to you, Mr. Colborne; nor do I find any pleasure in forcing it upon you.'

Douglas stared and laughed a little. Leonforte's slow enunciation and stilted phraseology irritated him, and he hardly knew in what tone to respond. It would have given him a good deal of satisfaction to kick the man; but, that being out of the question, he kept his temper and remarked:

'I remember that, when we last met, you told me you had made my acquaintance against your will, and I believe I answered that I hadn't asked my cousin to introduce me to you—or something to that effect.'

The Marchese bowed gravely. 'Your memory is perfectly correct, sir,' replied he. 'You may also recollect that I mentioned my reason for not desiring to be personally acquainted with you, and that you were so obliging as to hand me your card.'

In Italy, in France—everywhere, I believe, except in this country, and perhaps in America—such an action could have had only one meaning, and I should have known what steps to take in consequence of it.’

The Marchese paused here and looked so bellicose that Douglas laughed again. ‘Do you really mean to say,’ asked the latter, ‘that you have come here to challenge me to mortal combat? I suppose you do; though I can’t for the life of me imagine why you should. Well, I’m afraid I can’t accommodate you: there is no such thing as duelling in England nowadays.’

‘I have already intimated,’ returned the Italian, ‘that I am aware of the strange condition of things which you describe. I will not disguise from you that, if you had been a Frenchman or an Italian, I should have had the honour of sending you my *témoins*, instead of calling upon you personally.’

‘You are too kind. But why would you have done so, if I may take the liberty of inquiring?’

‘It appears to me, sir, that the question is superfluous. If you had not been an Englishman, you would have considered yourself insulted—and you would have had a right to consider yourself insulted—by what I said to you.’

‘I see. Only then it would have been my privilege to send a couple of friends to demand satisfaction from you, wouldn’t it?’

Leonforte frowned and shrugged his shoulders. He had not come to Clarges Street for the purpose of quarrelling with Mr. Colborne; but he had not come for the purpose of being laughed at either, and he now perceived that he had made a little mistake by alluding to a duel which was not going to take place. He was, moreover, somewhat at a loss for words, having carefully rehearsed all his speeches in advance, and being unable to hit upon one which would fit in neatly at the present juncture. He, therefore, muttered an imprecation in his own language and followed it up by saying, in less correct English than he had hitherto employed:

‘You do not hold yourself for insulted?—very good!—very well!—to me it is all equal. But, as a friend of the Countess Radna, I permit myself to tell you that you are treating her in a fashion intolerable!’

‘Then,’ answered Douglas, getting up and standing with his back towards the empty grate, ‘you permit yourself a liberty which isn’t permitted in this country, although duelling has been

done away with. I don't mind telling you frankly that I wish it hadn't been done away with, and that I should like nothing better than to be given a chance of punishing you for your impertinence ; but, as it is, I can't do that without making myself supremely ridiculous. For much the same reasons, I can't resent an affront offered to me in my own rooms otherwise than by requesting you to be so good as to leave them. I hope you won't take it into your head to fancy that I am afraid of you ; but if you choose to do so, you must ; I have no power to prove the contrary.'

Leonforte, who had also risen to his feet, was slightly mollified and slightly ashamed. After all, it was not the other man's fault that the absurd customs of his country forbade him to avenge an insult, and it is not very magnanimous to insult one who labours under such restrictions.

'Mr. Colborne,' said he, 'I have to offer you my excuses. I do not doubt your courage, and I was wrong to speak to you as I did, since I could say what I pleased without risking my skin. Unhappily, I cannot retract what I said, because it was true. You have cruelly injured a lady for whom I have an esteem and a respect of the most profound.'

Douglas, who had been thoroughly angry for a moment, was now half-angry, half-amused, and wholly puzzled. The Italian seemed to be an honest sort of individual ; but if he recognised the impossibility of fighting, and if he had not come to demand an explanation, what did the man want ? After a pause, he said : 'You can't suppose that I shall submit to be put upon my defence by you. May I ask whether you are here as my wife's representative?'

'By no means ! I have not the smallest authority to speak on behalf of the Countess ; I speak only as one who greatly admires and pities that unfortunate lady, and I am here only to suggest to you, sir, that you should release her from bonds which you are evidently as anxious to break as she can be. You will say, perhaps, that the law does not allow you to do so. I believe that is the case ; but the Church is above the law, and I do not think it would be impossible to obtain a dissolution of your marriage from the Holy See. Not desiring to be offensive, I will not mention any lady's name, nor will I attempt to hold out inducements ; but it is a matter of common conversation that you would willingly replace the Countess Radna by a second wife, and I myself have observed——'

'My good sir,' interrupted Douglas, 'you really are talking the most dreadful nonsense I ever heard a man talk in my life. Excuse my cutting you short; but you seem to be under a total misapprehension. In the first place, you are quite mistaken in imagining that the Holy See can annul a legal marriage; in the second place, I haven't the remotest idea or intention of taking a second wife; and, in the third place, I certainly haven't been guilty of any cruelty whatsoever towards the lady who remains my wife, although she has seen fit to separate herself from me. I don't owe you any account of the circumstances; but, on the other hand, I have no particular objection to giving you one. Upon my honour as a gentleman, I don't to this day know why my wife left me, unless it was because she had become tired of me. She didn't like English country life, and I, being a Member of Parliament and having a small estate to look after, couldn't consent to reside abroad. That was the ostensible reason for our parting, and I am not acquainted with any other, except that of which I told you just now.'

Leonforte gazed at his interlocutor and sighed. 'I believe that you are speaking the truth, sir,' he said at length.

'Thank you; but if you will reflect for a moment, you will perceive that I could have had no conceivable motive for telling you a lie. I haven't asked you any questions, and I don't intend to ask you any. You may have had reasons of your own for wishing to bring about an impossible divorce——'

The Marchese threw up his right hand and shook his head.

'Oh, I think you must have had reasons; but I dare say they were legitimate reasons enough, considering that you have so obviously been made the victim of some deception: anyhow, as I said before, I don't care to inquire into them. But I hope you understand now that, instead of talking to a miscreant of romance, you are merely talking to an ordinary, commonplace Briton who, through no special fault of his own, has been placed in an awkward situation from which it is out of his power to extricate himself.'

'Yes,' answered Leonforte, smiling for the first time, 'I think I can understand; and it may be that I have been deceived about you, though I do not believe that any one has wished to practise a deception upon me. But this situation which you find so awkward—you will not attempt, then, to extricate yourself from it by means of a divorce?'

'Nobody, I suppose, would attempt what is manifestly im-

possible. Moreover, I don't wish to be divorced from my wife, although I gather from what you say that she wishes to be divorced from me. Hitherto I haven't interfered with her liberty, nor do I propose to do so; I am willing to grant her all the advantages that belong to a separation which was not of my choosing. I can't do more.'

'Ah,' exclaimed Leonforte half-involuntarily, 'you would not speak like that if you loved her!'

'Shouldn't I? It seems to me that I should; and I might fairly retort that she wouldn't have treated me as she has done if she had loved me. However, you may tell her from me, if you think it worth while, that I am as ready as I have been from the first to let bygones be bygones, and that I have never been untrue to her either by act or by wish. I am afraid no advice of mine is likely to be of service to you; still you might do worse than to profit by my experience. The Countess Radna will never care for any man long, because she will never be able to care much for him after she has satisfied her curiosity by finding out all that there is to be found out about him.'

These words of warning were forced from Douglas by a feeling of mortification which he was doing his best to subdue. He knew that they were not in very good taste; but he could not swallow them down, and they were evidently not without effect upon his visitor, who kept silence for a few instants before looking up and answering:

'I am obliged to you, Mr. Colborne; I think you are a gallant man, though your English fashions of behaviour are to me a little incomprehensible. You have divined what I could not have told you without being grossly insulting, and it appears that no man can insult another in this country. I hope you have divined that I also wish to conduct myself as a gallant man; but what can I say to you? The situation is more than awkward; it is—it is inconceivable!'

'It can't very well be that, since it exists. I have already told you that I am powerless to extricate myself from it in its present phase; but I may be able to extricate myself from it honourably when it enters upon a fresh one—as I presume that it will. Whether you will be able to extricate yourself from it honourably is another question. Perhaps you would do well to consider it while you have yet time.'

Leonforte made one of those expressive gestures which the

Latin races are wont to substitute for language. 'You are right,' he exclaimed—'you are entirely right! Yet it remains true that you do not love her. I will report this conversation to her scrupulously; I have not been commissioned by her to seek it, and I do not know how she will take my account of it. Personally, I am persuaded that I have had a false impression of you, sir; and, whatever may happen in the future, I shall always be at your orders. It is droll; but—it is like that! I can offer you no other satisfaction.'

Leonforte meant to be strictly honest, and Douglas gave him full credit for that excellent intention; but it is scarcely surprising that the Countess Radna's husband should have formed erroneous conclusions as to the position and privileges of the Countess Radna's avowed admirer. The former, when he had bowed his visitor out, was a good deal less calm than he appeared to be. It was all very fine for the Marchese to affirm that he held no commission; but he had obviously been informed that the Countess wished for a divorce from her husband. Well, it rested with her to obtain what she desired. 'She can hardly,' thought Douglas, with an angry laugh, 'expect me to go over to Paris in order to beat her, as a preliminary measure.'

Anyhow, he himself was blameless; he had nothing whatsoever to reproach himself with; nor was it his fault that he could take no step to facilitate her release. The only thing that worried him was that phrase of Leonforte's which rang persistently in his ears, 'You would not speak like that if you loved her!' Had he ceased to love her? If he had, so much the better; for it had been very clearly demonstrated that her love for him was a thing of the past. Nevertheless, his conscience was too sensitive to grant him a clean bill of indemnity, and it was not with political questions that he was preoccupied when the time came for him to walk down to Westminster.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DRAWING-ROOM DIPLOMACY.

FRANK INNES was one of those amiable mortals to whom it is always impossible to keep their own counsel. He thought too well of his fellow-creatures at large to believe that they could take no interest at all in affairs which nearly concerned him, and he thought so well of his cousin Douglas Colborne in particular that,

after the conversation with Lady Florence Carey which has been partially recorded in a previous chapter, it became a matter of imperative necessity for him to look up that perplexed politician and tell him all about it.

'I warned you of what was in store for you,' was Douglas's comment upon the narrative to which he had listened with patient attention; 'there never was, and never could have been, the shadow of a hope that those people would look twice at you.'

'Oh, yes; I know,' returned Frank somewhat impatiently; 'I didn't expect them to welcome me with blessings and promises of liberal settlements. But, for all that, I don't see why I should despair yet awhile. You yourself, the last time that I spoke to you, seemed to admit that it was for Lady Florence to say the last word.'

'Well; she has said it, hasn't she?'

'In a way she has; but of course she acted under compulsion. She wouldn't have consented to meet me at Miss Rowley's if she had really and finally made up her mind to throw me over; and, what's more, I don't believe that, if she had, Miss Rowley would have asked her to meet me.'

'That only shows that Miss Rowley is a very injudicious friend.'

'You ought to be the last person to say so; for she has been a tolerably judicious friend to you, by all accounts. You must know that she has. I'm sure you do know it, and I'm sure you won't be so pig-headed as to refuse office after all the efforts that she has made to smooth down the bigwigs for you.'

'Upon my word, I didn't know that she had made any efforts on my behalf,' answered Douglas. 'If it is true that she has, I am very grateful to her, and very sorry that she should have wasted her time in that way. The question of my accepting or refusing office—supposing that it should be offered to me—is a perfectly simple one. It depends upon a few straightforward conditions, which can't be affected one way or the other by drawing-room diplomacy.'

'Oh, I expect they can. Drawing-room diplomacy, as you call it, counts for something, though I suppose you won't allow that it does, and Miss Rowley is a good friend of yours, whether you'll allow it or whether you won't. She is just as anxious as I am, for instance, that you should come to an understanding with the Countess—or, at least, that you should come to the end of a misunderstanding.'

‘You are both of you very kind. Did Miss Rowley mention her anxiety upon the subject to you?’

‘Not in so many words; the truth is that she and I have had other things to talk about of late. But I haven’t the slightest doubt as to her opinions and wishes, and you may depend upon it that she won’t let a chance slip of bringing together two people who ask nothing better than to be brought together again. By the way, have you seen that Italian chap since the evening when I introduced him to you?’

‘Yes; he did me the honour to call upon me, and what he said certainly did not convey to me the idea that my wife was eager for a reconciliation. But aren’t we rather wandering from the point? The point, I presume, is that Lady Florence would be willing to marry you if such an arrangement were at all practicable; but that she doesn’t at present see how it could be made practicable.’

‘Of course that’s the point, so far as I am concerned; and, as I said before, I think it’s a strong enough point to keep me from despairing. Why shouldn’t I make a pot of money upon the stage and the platform? And why shouldn’t she wait until I have made it?’

‘Nothing is more improbable than that she will wait or be allowed to wait; I can’t pretend to judge what your chances of making a pot of money are. Have you written to your father?’

‘Rather!—and had the answer that I knew I should get. He has a very pretty literary style when he is out of temper, as he is on most days of the week, and he says he hopes I shall have the decency to change my name before I exhibit myself in public as a mountebank. I’ve no doubt I shall be able to oblige him in that respect, and, as I’m independent of him, I needn’t quarrel with him for calling me a mountebank. Your sanction is a good deal more important to me than his—yours and Miss Rowley’s. You two have befriended me; you have some claim upon my obedience; and I’m very glad to think that neither of you has positively forbidden me to make my fortune in the only way that is open to me.’

‘I shouldn’t have thought that Miss Rowley had any special claim upon your obedience,’ said Douglas, who was somewhat irritated, without quite knowing why, by the prominent part which had been assigned to that lady in the above dialogue. ‘For my own part, I have no pretension to make you obey me and no

expectation that you would do so, if I were foolish enough to crack the whip over your head. Perhaps, though, I may take the liberty of remarking that it is scarcely worth while to quarrel with your father and throw up your profession upon the off-chance that Lady Florence Carey will be so romantic as to wait for you and insist upon marrying you three or four years hence. Even if she were—and the chances are fully a thousand to one against it—how can you tell that you will want to marry her three or four years hence? In all probability you will want very much to marry somebody else by that time. I suppose you won't believe it; but it is nevertheless the fact that all human beings are inconstant, and that women are far more inconstant than men.'

Frank replied by throwing himself back in his chair and laughing aloud. 'I beg your pardon, old chap,' said he, as soon as he had overcome his hilarity; 'but it is better to laugh at you than to swear at you, and one can't help doing the one or the other when you say things which you are the last man in the world to take for facts. I know exactly what it is: that Italian beggar has put your back up, and you're in an infernal rage with women in general. You'll allow them some few virtues as soon as you find out that the Countess is only waiting for you to advance a step to meet her. As for me, I'm not going to despise a girl who has owned that she loves me until she forces me to despise her; and I'm not going to quarrel with my father either. I can't help it if he chooses to quarrel with me, can I?'

Douglas had nothing to add to the remonstrances which he had already felt bound to formulate, nor did he deem it consistent with self-respect to mention all the reasons that he had for holding a low opinion of women at large and of his own wife especially. He thought, however, that Peggy Rowley might have known better than to encourage a young idiot in his idiocy, and he resolved to tell her what he thought in plain words the very next time that he met her. He was entitled to treat her as a friend—not to call her a slightly officious friend—and one of the most essential privileges which belong to friendship is that of free speech.

It so happened that he encountered her, the same evening, at a crowded official reception, and he would have attacked her at once had she not eagerly introduced another subject before he had time to open his lips.

'Am I to congratulate you?' she asked. 'I do hope so; because, if I am not, I shall be driven to execrate you. I tell you

candidly that it is more than I ventured to expect for you, and most people would tell you that it is more than you have earned.'

'I haven't the most distant idea of what you are talking about,' answered Douglas.

'Oh, nonsense! You mean, I suppose, that all the formalities haven't been gone through yet; but you are certainly aware that a new Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs has to be appointed, and that you will be that new Under-Secretary, unless you are utterly blind to your own interests.'

'No; I have heard nothing more than rumours. I saw several names mentioned in the evening papers; but mine was not among them.'

'Naturally it wasn't; the newspapers invariably name the wrong man, and if, by any chance, they were to hit upon the right one, it would tell against him. I thought you would have had a letter before now; but, as you haven't, I venture to assure you upon my own responsibility that you are safe to get one. I don't say that you have no enemies in high places; but you have friends as well, and your friends have carried the day this time.'

'Does that mean that I am blessed with unofficial partisans, and that you are the most influential of them?'

'It means that I have done my little best: you might have counted upon me to do that. At the same time, you know as well as I do that promotion doesn't go by favour in these days. You were certain to get something: all one could do was to plead for the best thing going; and I do modestly flatter myself that I have been of some small service to you in that way.'

The truth was that Miss Rowley had exerted herself to the utmost, and was not a little proud of what she had achieved; so that she felt proportionately snubbed when the recipient of her benefits replied: 'It is most kind of you to have interested yourself for me; but I hope you won't think me very ungrateful for saying that I would rather not be hoisted into office upon anybody's shoulders. I don't so very much care about office; but if I am to have it, I should prefer to think that I had won it upon my own merits. However, I haven't been asked to take it yet.'

Peggy had an almost perfect temper; but this was a little more than she could bear with equanimity. She said:

'I don't know what you would have, and what's more, I don't believe you know either. I apologise for having interfered; I won't offend in that way a second time. Luckily, there is no

harm done; because it is still open to you to reject advances with which you won't be troubled again. If you are not satisfied with being shunted on to a siding where you will have ample leisure to grow wise and grey before anybody comes to disturb you, all I can say is that you will have shown yourself rather hard to please.'

Douglas tried to look penitent, and, being a wretched hand at dissimulation, failed signally. It was with an irrepressible smile upon his lips that he rejoined: 'Ah, you do think me ungrateful! I was afraid you would, and I am very sorry for it. All the same, I am not ungrateful, and most likely I shan't request the Ministry to shunt me, though I shan't break my heart if they do. How am I to explain myself to you without seeming rude? I am immensely obliged to you; but—well, life isn't all politics, you see.'

'Oh, I am not quite so blind as to be unable to see that; but my sight really isn't keen enough to discern your motives for entering upon a political career and then declining to play the game. Perhaps, though, you do mean to play the game, and it is only my humble intervention that you wish to resent. If so, I can but assure you once more that you shall not have any cause to complain of it in future.'

It may be true that there is something not altogether displeasing to us in the misfortunes of our best friends; but one hopes that it is untrue. What we can all concede with less reluctance is that there is occasionally something rather pleasing to us in their anger; and Douglas was not ashamed of having irritated a lady who had goodnaturedly irritated and humiliated him many and many a time. He wanted her to understand that he stood in no need of patronage, and it looked as if he had succeeded in bringing that conviction home to her.

'I don't think I have broken the rules of the game up to now,' he remarked, 'and I trust that I shall continue to pay due respect to them. Only the game and its rules are not of supreme consequence to me. I have tried my luck at other games and have lost. Such experiences breed a philosophic calm and indifference to defeat. The sun will go on rising and setting as usual, whether I am selected or whether I am shunted.'

Miss Rowley turned the tables upon him by recovering her good humour and declaring that she had never in her life heard philosophic indifference proclaimed with such obvious insincerity.

'When one really doesn't care,' she added, 'one doesn't take the trouble to assert how little one cares in such admirably chosen

language. You and I are old friends; so we needn't try to humbug one another. Your complaint is easily enough discovered by an old friend: it isn't philosophy and it isn't indifference; it's nothing in the world but that petulance which prompts a small boy to smack the nearest person to him in the face. I confess that I don't like being smacked in the face, and I confess that for a minute or two I was very much inclined to smack you back; but I feel better now and I forgive you. You also look as if you felt better by this time, and I dare say you are enough of a calm philosopher to take the good things sent you by the Gods, *en attendant mieux*. Better things will come in due course. They have come as far as Paris, I hear, and they will step across the Channel, if only you will have the patience to refrain from beckoning to them.'

Douglas bit his lips and shook his head. It vexed him to be called petulant, because he was conscious of a certain degree of petulance; but he was quite sure that Peggy was mistaken as to its cause. Since, however, he himself was unable to account for it satisfactorily, he thought it best to ignore her allusion.

'I am sorry if I spoke snappishly,' said he. 'I didn't mean to be snappish; but the fact is that one's old friends sometimes do rather provoking and incomprehensible things. What possible object can you have in encouraging this foolish affair between Frank Innes and Lady Florence Carey? You can't, surely, think that you are showing the boy any kindness by encouraging him!'

'If it comes to that, you have no business to think that you are showing him any kindness by encouraging him to believe that he will be your heir. Set me down as a meddling busybody, if you like; I shall endeavour to survive your censure. It is true that up to the present time I have done all I could to discourage your cousin; but I don't promise to go on discouraging him. Why shouldn't he have his little romance, like the rest of us? And why shouldn't Florry have hers? Say what you will, they may marry eventually, if they are steadfast enough, in spite of you and me and Lady Burcote and all the dictates of common sense. Such things have happened before now.'

'Not very often, have they?'

'Oh dear, yes, I should think so—heaps of times! But you are like all men; you think that the world was created only for you, and that everybody's love-affairs, except your own, are sheer foolishness. Here comes the Prime Minister, with a benevolent

look in his eye which is evidently meant to catch yours. Go and hear what he has to say to you, and don't be as cheeky to him as you have been to me, or he will make short work of you. Seriously, and as my last word, you ought not to be too hard upon me if I *am* a busybody. What else is there left for a lone, lorn woman to be? And I haven't injured either you or your cousin yet by my intermeddling.'

Peggy disappeared into the throng, and the Prime Minister, who, it seemed, really did wish to speak to Mr. Colborne, took her place. The great man was very kind and very complimentary; Douglas would have had no excuse for being cheeky to him, even if he had wished to manifest his independence after that unwise fashion; nor did he feel that he had any excuse for refusing the post of responsibility which was presently submitted to him for acceptance or rejection. He was told candidly that his support in the House of Commons was considered worth the high price offered for it; sundry observations which he deemed it incumbent upon him to make were listened to attentively and answered in a manner which satisfied him, and when he went away, he could not help being conscious that he was a much bigger personage than he had been earlier in the evening.

Some men, of course, are far more covetous of public honours and distinctions than others; but only a very few positively dislike them, and Douglas Colborne did not belong to that select band. Although success in public life could not compensate him for the total failure which he felt that he had made of his private life, it was at least of some value as a consolation. Only he still wished that such success as had fallen to his share had not been brought about by the exertions of Peggy Rowley. He said to himself that she was indeed a true friend, and that he was very fond of her, but that it was a little absurd on her part to patronise him, to laugh at him for what she was pleased to call his petulance, and to treat him as though she had been so very much older and wiser than he was. Then he remembered what Leonforte had somewhat impertinently said, and recalled certain remarks quite as impertinent which had been made by other people and had reached his ears. It really seemed a pity that Miss Spofforth, or somebody else who possessed experience and influence, should not breathe a word of warning in the proper quarter, and remind Peggy that she was neither aged enough nor ugly enough to despise the purveyors of scandal. For a moment

he thought that he would do this himself, but upon further consideration he decided that he wouldn't. Such a caution, coming from him, might strike her as ridiculous, and she seemed to consider him sufficiently ridiculous as it was.

On the following day he went to see his mother, who was overjoyed on hearing that he had accepted office and who confidently predicted a brilliant career for him.

'Only,' she added, 'I do wish that you could make an end of your unhappy and quite uncalled-for difference with poor, dear Hélène. She won't write to me, so I can't tell what her ideas are; but it is too absurd that there should be a deadly quarrel about nothing at all. You will have to begin entertaining your friends before long, and your present position is—well, you won't mind my calling it anomalous.'

'I don't mind your treating it to any epithet that you may consider suitable,' answered Douglas; 'but I'm afraid it will have to remain what it is. There is no practicable method of altering it that I know of.'

Mrs. Colborne was restrained by her religious principles, as well as by her reluctance to drive a large fortune out of the family, from suggesting an appeal to the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Courts; but Loo, who followed her brother downstairs after he had taken his leave, was less discreet.

'If Hélène refuses to come back to you, the law ought to set you free from her,' the girl declared.

'Perhaps so,' answered Douglas, smiling; 'but, as a matter of fact, the law can't set me free, so long as she abstains from replacing me.'

'Then I wish—no, I won't say that I wish that. But I do wish that you had never married her, and that you had married Peggy Rowley instead! It seems very hard that people should be punished all their lives long for having made a little mistake!'

Possibly it was hard, and possibly he had made a mistake; he could not quite make up his mind as to either point. But what was as clear as daylight was that it behoved him to dismiss a dangerous subject from his thoughts. After all, he had no right whatsoever to take it for granted that Peggy Rowley would have married him if he had wished her to do so; and he was still in love—more or less in love—with the woman whom he had married. Leonforte, to be sure, had asserted that he was not; but Leonforte did not understand Englishmen.

(To be continued.)

